

Beyond Market

it's simplified...

NIRMAL BANG
a relationship beyond broking

a financial magazine crossing horizons

Policy Failure Or Strategic Choice

Record rupee weakness raises questions: structural vulnerability or deliberate strategy to counter US tariffs?

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Leaner AI

India's IT giants are betting on Gen AI to modernize enterprises while cutting headcount and protecting margins

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Cane Conundrum

Rising production costs and falling prices threaten ₹2,000 crore sugarcane arrears as mills seeks policy intervention - Page 29

"I stop the unnecessary redemption. If they need ₹2 lakh, I will withdraw only ₹2 lakh, not entire ₹5 lakh."

-Sadashiv Phene-

"Honest opinion dete hain, honest approach rakhte hain, toh client khush hote hain aur referral apne aap hi milta hai."

-Bhoopesh Jain-

"Result pe mat focus karo, process pe focus karo. Matlab apne kaam pe focus karo."

-Mukund Seshadri-

"Mutual Fund jitna simple product poori Equity Industry mein nahi hai."

-Hitesh Shah-

"100 logon ko milenge aap. 100 log na bolenge toh 101 aadmi jo aapko haan bolega, wahi aapko aur do logon ka reference dega."

-Pranav Muzumdar-

"Aapko zyada focus brokerage pe nahi karna hai. Aap focus kariye client ke goals pe client ko help karne ke liye and baaki sab apne aap hote rahega."

-Tirth Gala-



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for all Mutual Fund Distributors**



Host

Rakesh Bhandari, Director | Nirmal Bang

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Nirmal Bang Wealth Pvt Ltd, ARN - 111233 Mutual Fund Distributor
Regd. Office: B - 201, Khandelwal House, Poddar Road, Malad (East), Mumbai - 400097.

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Editor-in-Chief & Publisher:
Rakesh Bhandari
Editor: Tushita Nigam
Senior Sub-Editor: Kiran V Uchil

Art Director: Sachin Kamble
Graphic Designer: Rikisha R M

Operations: Namrata Sabbani

Research Team: Sunil Jain,
Vikas Salunkhe, Swati Hoikar,
Nirav Chheda, Amit Bhuptani,
Ritu Poddar, Uma Gouda,
Chaitali Salve, Harsh Budar

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House, Poddar Road, Malad (E)
Mumbai - 400097.
Editor: Tushita Nigam

REGISTERED OFFICE
Nirmal Bang Financial Services
Pvt Ltd
601/6th Floor, Khandelwal
House, Poddar Road, Malad
(East) Mumbai - 400097
Tel: 022 - 6273 9600

Web: www.nirmalbang.com |
beyondmarket@nirmalbang.com
Tel No: 022 - 6273 8047

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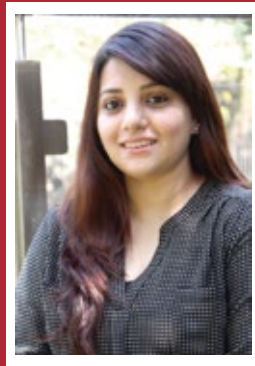
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Tushita Nigam
Editor

KEEPING UP WITH GEN Z

The Bollywood industry has been on a constant mission to revamp its image and appeal to a large section of society - Gen Z. This attempt to garner maximum eyeballs has evolved to accommodate their tastes and to keep them hooked for years to come. Our cover story explores this evolution and underscores the need to connect with upcoming generations.

Moving on, you'll come across articles on the Indian rupee crossing the psychological barrier of ₹90 against the US dollar and its impact on the economy and various sectors; what 2025 looks like for the Banking, Financial Services & Insurance (BFSI) sector with execution being key; India's mineral situation amid growing demand for rare earth elements, with emphasis on how incentives and regulatory changes are supporting it; and AI strategies followed by IT giants to increase margins.

This issue also features interesting reads on UPI making payments smoother and more digitally compatible; the sugar sector outlook with the start of the sugarcane crushing season; corporate sponsorship of sports in India that is ushering in an entirely new era for the sporting community, and the need for digital awareness to guard against digital fraud.

A light read occupies the Beyond Learning section, discussing how investors can turn errors into opportunities. Discover how you can rectify those mistakes. Also included is a ready reckoner with stock market holidays in 2026 for major stock exchanges across the globe.

Team Beyond Market wishes all its readers a Happy New Year filled with booming portfolios and prosperous investment decisions.

“The Indian stock markets are likely to remain range-bound.”

Nifty Futures: 25,955

(Last Traded Price As On 29th December '25)



Rupee depreciation led to fresh FII outflows, prompting RBI intervention through a USD/INR buy-sell swap and open market operations (OMO) to improve liquidity in the banking system.

A rise in prices of precious and base metals has led to a diversion of funds from equities to these asset classes.

A tariff deal between India and the US is still awaited.

In the coming days, the Indian stock markets are likely to remain range-bound. Nifty Futures has support at the 25,800 level. If it crosses 26,200, bullish momentum could emerge.

Market participants should watch out for corporate results for Q3 FY26, which are expected to show improvement, and the outcome of the US-India tariff negotiations.

Dilip Singh

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In recent weeks, the Indian Rupee (INR) has experienced a sharp and volatile depreciation, breaching the psychologically important level of 90 against the US Dollar. The currency touched a historic intraday low of 91.14 on 16th Dec '25. With a year-to-date decline exceeding 6%, the Rupee has emerged as the weakest-performing currency in Asia this year. The pressure is even more pronounced if compared with other major currencies. The INR has weakened by over 17% against the Euro and 8% against Japanese Yen.

In just over 14 years INR has lost almost half of its value with respect to the US Dollar. INR was around ₹47 per USD in 2011. Thereafter, the slide has been relentless from ₹67 to USD in 2016, ₹71 in 2019, ₹82 in 2022, and ₹90 to USD in 2025.

A gradual depreciation of the Rupee against the US Dollar is a long-standing structural feature for the Indian economy, averaging about 3% annually historically. Recent episodes of sharp INR depreciation include the 2018 sell-off (8.7% slide), the 2013 "taper tantrum," (14%) and the global financial crisis of 2008 (18.7%). A weakening Rupee raises important questions about the underlying drivers of the current episode and the appropriate policy response.

It is important to note that a controlled and predictable depreciation of the INR is not completely undesirable. From a policy perspective, a moderately weaker currency supports export competitiveness by making Indian goods cheaper in global markets. It also discourages excessive imports by raising their relative cost, thereby encouraging domestic production and import substitution. These mechanisms can support growth and employment when depreciation occurs in an orderly manner.

However, sharp and volatile currency movements impose significant economic costs. A rapidly weakening Rupee raises the domestic price of essential imports such as crude oil, gold and industrial commodities, thereby fuelling inflation. It also increases the burden of foreign currency borrowing for Indian corporates. Higher inflationary pressures often force tighter monetary policy, leading to higher interest rates and slower domestic demand. Moreover, sudden currency weakness can erode investor confidence, prompting capital outflows from financial markets.

In the current episode, among other factors, key reasons affecting the rupee negatively include widening current account deficit, delay in completing the US-India trade deal and sustained outflows by foreign portfolio investors. So, are policymakers in the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) and the government losing sleep over the Rupee's sharp depreciation?

A DELIBERATE ADJUSTMENT?

Commentaries from the government and the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) suggest that they see the recent slide in the Indian Rupee more as a short-term sentiment driven phenomenon rather than a structural issue. In fact many see the policymakers' inaction to defend the weakening Indian Rupee as a deliberate adjustment to enhance India's trade competitiveness in an increasingly protectionist global environment.

Policymakers are taking a wait-and-watch approach. The RBI typically tolerates depreciation of INR only within a limited range and intervenes in the foreign exchange market (either buying or selling USD) when risks intensify. To highlight, any intervention by the RBI in the FX market is a costly proposition as the country's foreign exchange reserves deplete to that same extent.

In the recent past, the central bank has tried to support the Indian Rupee in the FX market but in vain much to experts' criticism. This is

notwithstanding that the country's foreign exchange reserves with the RBI are at a comfortable level of around US \$700 billion. The current episode suggests that the RBI's tolerance for the Rupee's volatility and depreciation has shifted upwards.

From the government's perspective, they are taking comfort in the fact that the country's fundamentals are in good stead. India's GDP is expected to grow above 7% in fiscal year 2025-26, one of the best in the world.

Consumer price inflation stood at 0.71% in November below the RBI's target range of 2% to 6% for the third straight month. On the external front, India's current account deficit (CAD) stands at around 1.3% of GDP in the July-September quarter of fiscal year 2025-26 from 2.2% of GDP in the same quarter a year ago.

STRUCTURAL REASONS?

A view that the recent Rupee depreciation has more to do with non-fundamental factors may not be wrong. But it may not be completely right as well. Some caution is warranted. There are fears of some structural reasons to the current episode.

India has typically been a current account deficit country. And to fill the gap in the balance of payment, capital flows remain vital. When capital flows have been under pressure, like in current times, the country becomes exposed to external sector vulnerability.

What options does the country have? Just one, export more and import less. This will fix the problem of trade deficit. The recent overhaul of the labour code, push to make-in-India through production-linked-incentives

(PLI) and bilateral trade negotiations with various nations is seen as key to push manufacturing and exports.

This is especially significant after the levy of a 50% tariff by the US on India, more than on any other trading partner. Currently, exports to the US market have choked. India is trying to diversify its exports to other geographies.

And things seem to be improving on the exports front. Exports in November rose 19.37% year-on-year to US \$38.13 billion, a six-month high. In comparison, imports declined 1.88% to US \$62.66 billion. It remains to be seen if the trend sustains in the future.

DE-DOLLARIZATION - WHY CATCH A FALLING KNIFE

Another aspect to the policymakers' inaction seems

Key Factors For Current INR Depreciation

FPI Sell-off: A higher interest rate differential between the US and India has pushed investors to shift from Indian assets to safer dollar-based assets. In addition, limited investment opportunities in artificial intelligence and allied sectors in India - Key global investment themes in 2025 - have accelerated FPI outflows to these sectors globally. So far in 2025, foreign investors have sold over US \$18 billion of Indian equities. This is concerning as domestic investors have been unable to fully offset the selling pressure, resulting in subdued asset returns and persistent fears of further FPI exits. Importantly, FPI flows form a crucial component of India's capital account.

Rising Current Account Deficit (CAD): India's balance of payments consists of the current account (goods, services, income, and transfers) and the capital account (foreign investments and loans). India typically runs a deficit on the current account, which is filled by capital inflows, largely FPIs. With FPI outflows, concerns have risen over financing the BOP gap. The situation has been worsened by rising imports without a commensurate increase in exports, while the additional US tariff hike - raising total tariffs to 50% - has further slowed exports.

Lack of US-India Trade Deal: Higher US tariffs on India are being used as leverage in ongoing trade negotiations. The absence of a trade deal has weighed on the INR in currency markets.

to be the fact that in a multi polar world today the US Dollar's share in global trade and as reserve currency is expected to come down in the medium- to long-term. Simply put, the USD is likely to depreciate against all currencies eventually. Experts term this trend as 'de-dollarization.'

And there is evidence for such a trend unfolding. Global central banks have already started to diversify their FX reserves away from the US Dollar. More and more global trade invoicing is happening in non-USD denominated currencies pointing to reduced reliance on the Dollar.

In the fixed income market,

the share of foreign country's ownership in the US Treasury instruments is currently at a 15-year low. In the energy market, more and more crude oil deals are getting priced in non-USD denominated currency.

India too is making all efforts to reduce its reliance on USD. The country is pushing Unified Payment Interface (UPI) in all earnest with trade partners. UPI enables direct, low-cost, cross-border transactions in local currencies, thereby offering an alternative to the US dollar-centric financial system. India's active participation in various multilateral grouping like BRICs and others is also seen as an attempt to reduce Dollar

reliance.

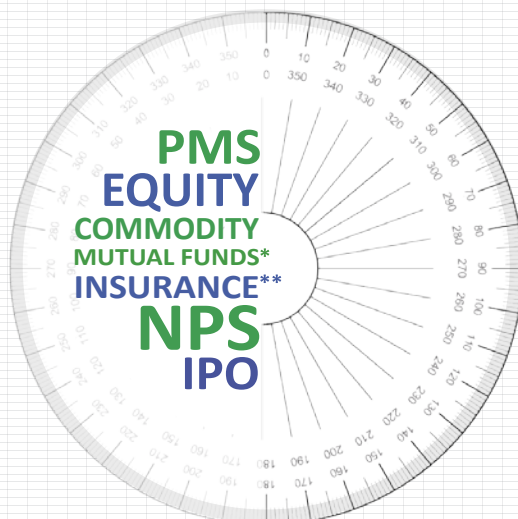
NEAR-TERM OUTLOOK

As de-dollarization gathers pace and global trade remains volatile, a country's ability to artificially halt currency depreciation is inherently limited.

A big positive in the ongoing episode of weakening Indian Rupee is that crude oil prices have remained with a lower bias. This has contained the trade deficit and any risk of imported inflation in India. In the near term, any signal of finalization of India-US trade deal could trigger a reversal in the INR-USD trend and reduce uncertainty in the foreign exchange market.



We Offer 360° Solutions



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BEFI 2026 OUTLOOK: GROWTH WITH GUARDRAILS

2026 is likely to be a year when regulatory intent, technological capability and strategic restraint converge. For banks, fintechs and MFIs alike, success is likely to depend less on speed and more on execution

India's financial system is expected to enter 2026 at a moment of recalibration rather than acceleration. After a decade marked by rapid digitization, credit expansion and the rise of platform-led finance, the coming year is likely to shape up as one in which growth is increasingly conditioned by discipline, governance and regulatory alignment. For banks, fintechs and microfinance institutions alike, the emphasis is expected to shift from scale to sustainability, from experimentation to execution, and from regulatory forbearance to firmer oversight.

Across the system, three forces are likely to dominate. First, interest rates are expected to soften, compressing margins and forcing lenders to rethink how they price risk and fund growth. Second, regulators are expected to translate years of consultation and pilots into enforceable rules, particularly in digital banking, payments and lending. Third, technology, especially artificial intelligence, is expected to move from the margins to the core of risk management, fraud control and operations, raising both efficiency gains and governance questions. How institutions respond to this combination will largely determine who thrives and who struggles in 2026.

BANKS: MEASURED GROWTH IN A SOFTER CYCLE

Indian banks are expected to approach 2026 with a clear bias towards quality-led expansion rather than balance-sheet growth at any cost. With lending rates likely to reprice lower and funding conditions expected to normalize only gradually, growth strategies are increasingly centred on protecting margins, rebuilding low-cost deposits and expanding granular retail and MSME lending without weakening capital or asset quality.

Margin management is likely to remain central. As policy rates ease, pressure on net interest margins is expected to persist, particularly for banks with a high share of floating-rate assets. Banks are likely to respond by recalibrating loan mixes towards higher-yield retail products, tightening pricing discipline and managing deposit costs more actively. Any benefit from lower incremental funding costs is expected to be partly offset by competitive loan pricing, suggesting margins may stabilize rather than expand meaningfully.

CASA growth is expected to return to the forefront of strategy.

Low-cost current and savings account deposits are increasingly viewed as the most durable defence against margin compression. Banks are expected to intensify digital acquisition of salary accounts, merchants and small businesses, while bundling payments, credit and wealth products to improve customer stickiness. Strengthening deposit franchises is likely to be as important as credit growth in sustaining profitability through the cycle.

Retail lending is expected to anchor loan expansion. Demand for home loans, vehicle finance and other secured retail products is likely to improve as borrowing costs ease. At the same time, banks are expected to expand unsecured retail lending cautiously, supported by tighter underwriting, analytics-led credit assessment and early-warning systems. Fee-based businesses such as wealth management and affluent banking are also expected to be scaled up to diversify revenue streams beyond interest income.

MSME lending is likely to regain momentum, supported by faster credit delivery and digital underwriting. Regulatory changes linking MSME loans to external benchmarks are expected to improve rate transmission and transparency, even as they compress spreads.

To compensate, banks are expected to emphasize volume growth, cross-selling and improved risk pricing, while maintaining conservative exposure limits.

FINTECHS: FROM SCALE TO SUSTAINABILITY

India's fintech sector is expected to enter 2026 in a more sober phase. After years of rapid customer acquisition and regulatory tolerance, growth at any cost is giving way to an emphasis on profitability, compliance and technological depth. The coming year is likely to separate firms that can convert reach into reliable revenue from those that struggle under closer scrutiny.

One of the most visible shifts is expected to be the move from experimental to operational use of artificial intelligence. Fintechs are likely to deploy AI more widely across onboarding, underwriting, fraud detection, customer support and compliance. More autonomous systems capable of handling tasks end to end could reshape back-office operations and decision-making. Yet this shift is also expected to sharpen concerns around data governance, model risk and ethical use. Firms that combine automation with transparency and strong controls are likely to gain trust with both partners and regulators.

Payments, long the backbone of Indian fintech, are expected to look outward. With domestic volumes driven by UPI approaching maturity, 2026 could mark a more serious push towards cross-border applications. Fintechs are preparing to enable UPI-linked payments for tourists, exporters, NRIs and global merchants. If

successful, this could transform India's domestic payments infrastructure into a gateway for international commerce.

Digital lending is also expected to undergo further recalibration. Tighter rules have reshaped how fintech lenders operate, pushing the sector towards clearer accountability and regulated structures. In 2026, lending models are expected to consolidate around bank- and NBFC-backed platforms with stronger underwriting and capital discipline. Growth may slow, particularly in unsecured credit, but borrower protection and sustainability are likely to improve.

COMPLIANCE MOVES TO CENTRE STAGE

Underlying these strategic shifts is a regulatory environment that is expected to become more assertive. A series of measures finalized over 2024–25 are scheduled to move from consultation to enforcement between January '26 and April '26, covering digital banking, basic savings accounts, payment aggregation, digital lending and the next phase of the e-rupee pilot.

From 1st Jan '26, new digital-banking directions are expected to come into force, consolidating previously fragmented guidelines on internet and mobile banking. These rules are expected to impose tighter customer-consent requirements, stronger cybersecurity standards and clearer definitions of digital services. Board-level

accountability for digital channels is expected to increase, requiring banks and their fintech partners to redesign onboarding flows, authentication mechanisms and incident-response frameworks.

A second major shift is expected from 1st Apr '26, when amended rules governing Basic Savings Bank Deposit accounts take effect. These changes are intended to reinforce financial inclusion by expanding mandatory free services, strengthening digital access and restricting incidental charges. While the intent is consumer protection, banks are expected to revisit fee structures, disclosures and servicing models as digital access becomes a default entitlement rather than an optional feature.

Payment aggregation is also set for closer supervision. Revised master directions have widened regulatory coverage to include governance norms, merchant due diligence, capital requirements, settlement timelines, escrow arrangements and data localization. Although compliance is being phased, most operational and technology upgrades are expected to be completed during 2026, raising the bar for both large platforms and smaller intermediaries.

Digital lending will continue to adjust under consolidated directions introduced earlier. These rules mandate standardized disclosures, curb abusive recovery practices and reinforce accountability even when loans are distributed

through third-party platforms. Growth is expected to slow, but the trade-off is greater transparency and durability.

AI AS INFRASTRUCTURE, NOT ORNAMENT

Technology is likely to play a decisive role in navigating this environment. AI is increasingly being treated not as a differentiator but as core infrastructure. Risk management is likely to see the deepest integration, with machine-learning models embedded into credit risk, liquidity monitoring and early-warning systems. Predictive analytics using granular data are expected to help institutions identify stress before it appears in financial results.

Fraud detection is another priority. As digital transactions rise, institutions are expected to rely on AI systems capable of real-time monitoring, behavioural analysis and anomaly detection. These models are expected to move beyond static rules, reducing false alerts while limiting customer friction.

Regulators, including the Reserve Bank of India, are expected to push for explainable AI, clear audit trails and strong governance. This is likely to shape how far and how fast automation is deployed, particularly in credit decisioning and customer-facing applications.

MICROFINANCE: CONSOLIDATION BEFORE RECOVERY

The microfinance sector is

expected to enter 2026 in a phase of consolidation rather than expansion. After a bruising period marked by rising delinquencies and curtailed disbursements, the emphasis is expected to shift towards credit repair, funding stability and regulatory alignment.

Loan portfolios are expected to remain under pressure through early 2026. Asset-quality stress is expected to peak towards the latter part of the financial year before easing gradually. Higher provisioning and write-offs are likely to weigh on near-term profitability but strengthen balance sheets over time.

Funding conditions are expected to remain uneven, favouring larger and better-capitalized institutions. Smaller MFIs may face liquidity constraints, accelerating consolidation through exits or partnerships. Despite these headwinds, underlying demand for small-ticket credit is expected to remain intact, allowing growth to return to low double digits under conservative assumptions.

INSURANCE: CRUISING ON GST TAILWINDS

India's insurance sector enters 2026 with strong structural tailwinds but rising execution challenges. Low penetration, improving incomes, regulatory reform and higher risk awareness continue to support long-term growth. At the same time, margin pressures, capital needs and compliance intensity are shifting the focus from rapid expansion to disciplined execution.

Premium growth is expected to remain in high single digits through 2026, led by private insurers. Life insurance is likely to grow steadily, supported by demographics and a gradual shift towards protection and non-linked products as insurers rebalance portfolios.

General insurance is expected to grow slightly faster, driven by health insurance, motor and infrastructure-linked covers. Health remains the strongest growth engine, underpinned by medical inflation, wider hospital access and sustained risk consciousness.

Regulatory liberalization, particularly higher foreign ownership limits, is reshaping the sector by improving capital availability and governance. However, benefits will be uneven.

Private insurers are better positioned to attract capital, while public sector insurers continue to face efficiency and capital constraints, increasing the likelihood of consolidation.

Distribution will be a key differentiator. Growth is shifting from urban markets to semi-urban and rural regions, with digital channels, embedded insurance and bancassurance lowering acquisition costs and expanding reach.

Profitability remains under pressure from rising health claims, climate-related risks and compliance costs. By 2026, success will hinge less on scale and more on underwriting discipline, capital efficiency and customer trust.

MAGNETIC SHIFT



India's ₹7,280-Crore Push Aims To Break China's Rare Earth Dominance

India is entering one of the most strategically significant phases of its industrial evolution. With the launch of the National Critical Mineral Mission (NCMM) and the newly approved Rare Earth Permanent Magnet Manufacturing Scheme in November '25, the country is undertaking an ambitious effort to secure critical mineral supplies while building advanced manufacturing capabilities in rare earth magnets.

The Union Cabinet in November '25 announced the policy with an outlay of ₹7,280 crore over seven years. This PLI (Production-Linked Incentive)-style scheme is intended to establish India as a key player in the high-performance magnet value chain.

These moves could redefine India's electric mobility, renewable energy, electronics, and defence ecosystems.

THE STRATEGIC IMPORTANCE OF RARE EARTHS IN THE GLOBAL TECHNOLOGY RACE

Rare earth elements such as neodymium, praseodymium, dysprosium and terbium are the quiet enablers of modern technology. These metals underpin the neodymium-iron-boron (NdFeB) magnets used in electric vehicle traction motors, wind turbine generators, industrial automation systems, robotics, drones, appliances, smartphones and a wide range of defence applications. They are valued not for scarcity but for unique magnetic and thermal properties that allow compact, energy-efficient and high-performance designs.

Global dependence on China has long been an issue. China dominates the rare earth supply chain - from mining to ore dressing, separation, metal making and magnet manufacturing - controlling more than 80% of global capacity. Even technologically advanced economies such as Japan, Korea, the United States and Europe rely heavily on Chinese magnets.

FILLING THE GAP

Despite holding an estimated 6.9 million tonnes of rare earth oxide equivalent reserves, India has historically extracted little value from this resource. Restrictive mineral classifications, technological gaps, under-investment and weak linkages

between upstream and downstream segments have prevented the country from gaining meaningful industrial foothold. The policy reset in 2025 marks a decisive shift.

As global geopolitics increasingly centres on mineral security, India's strategic push could have good long term positive implications.

NATIONAL CRITICAL MINERAL MISSION

The recently approved policy is part of the National Critical Mineral Mission, which is again the most comprehensive effort that India is making across critical minerals such as rare earths, lithium, cobalt, nickel, and graphite. With a multi-year outlay exceeding ₹16,000 crore, the mission aims to strengthen exploration, expand domestic mining, improve processing capabilities, promote recycling and build global partnerships.

HUGE DEMAND

The impetus for the scheme is the alarming projection that India's domestic consumption of high-performance REPMs (primarily Neodymium-Iron-Boron or NdFeB magnets) is expected to double by 2030 from current 2025 levels. This surge is driven by India's own requirements for the rare metals.

Currently, India meets its demand almost entirely through imports (over 53,000 metric tonnes imported in FY25), leaving its strategic sectors vulnerable to geopolitical supply disruptions,

such as recent export controls imposed by China. The scheme directly tackles this by aiming to build 6,000 MTPA of integrated domestic capacity over next seven years, significantly moving the country towards self-reliance.

FUELLING ASPIRATIONS FOR MORE EXPLORATIONS

A defining element is the significant expansion of exploration. The Geological Survey of India and allied agencies have been tasked with executing more than 1,200 exploration projects by 2030, with rare earths forming a major part of this effort.

Rajasthan, for instance, has seen a meaningful increase in identified resources, with more than 1,11,000 tonnes of rare earth oxide equivalent added to the national inventory. Coastal deposits in Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh and Odisha - rich in monazite-bearing sands - are receiving renewed focus after decades of underutilization.

This surge in exploration means more geological visibility, reduced project uncertainty and a stronger pipeline of auctionable blocks. For investors, this translates into clearer early-stage opportunities and more predictable pathways from discovery to development.

Rare earth processing is technologically demanding, capital-intensive, and environmentally sensitive. The NCMM's thrust on building separation capacity, supporting R&D, and forging technology partnerships is,

therefore, equally significant.

REMOVE REGULATORY FRICTIONS

Policy reforms under the Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) Act (MMDR) are crucial complements to India's mineral strategy. Key measures introduced include centralized auctions for strategic minerals, new and clearer licence categories (such as composite and exploration licences), and mechanisms for streamlined clearances.

These changes are specifically engineered to significantly reduce regulatory friction and mitigate the approval delays historically associated with project development in India. By establishing transparent, uniform standards driven by national interest, the policy direction is unequivocally pro-development.

While efficient state-level execution will continue to differentiate projects, the overriding objective is to create an investment climate that attracts substantial, long-term private-sector participation and capital commitment to India's critical mineral exploration and processing sector, thus de-risking the entire upstream value chain.

RECYCLING COULD BE ANOTHER BIG AREA

Recycling represents another forward-looking pillar. A dedicated ₹1,500 crore scheme aims to support recovery of rare earths, lithium, cobalt, and nickel

from used batteries, e-waste and industrial residues. While rare earth recycling remains technologically complex, India's growing EV and electronics waste streams offer long-term potential for circular-economy businesses, process-technology firms and integrated OEMs.

BOOST FOR PERMANENT MAGNET

Magnet manufacturing scheme is the downstream accelerator. It aims to build 6,000 tonnes per annum of domestic NdFeB magnet manufacturing capacity by 2030. India currently imports almost all its permanent magnets, making this initiative both economically and strategically crucial.

With an outlay of ₹7,280 crore, the scheme provides substantial capital support - around ₹6,500 crore in subsidies - to reduce upfront investment barriers.

These subsidies improve project internal rates of return and make greenfield magnet plants financially viable, particularly for first-time entrants and technologically sophisticated manufacturers. Performance-linked incentives further reward high utilization, deeper domestic value addition and deliveries to strategic sectors or exports.

India needs integrated magnet facilities, not shallow assembly units. This means integrated plants covering oxide processing, alloy preparation, sintering, machining and finishing - steps where the real value addition occurs.

Demand visibility is exceptionally strong. India's EV penetration targets across two-wheelers, three-wheelers, buses and passenger cars imply a steep rise in magnet requirements.

Wind energy - especially direct-drive turbine designs - relies on NdFeB magnets. Industrial automation, appliances, consumer electronics, drones and robotics consume a diverse array of permanent magnets.

Defence applications - ranging from avionics to missile guidance and radar - are particularly magnet-intensive and strategically sensitive.

A domestic magnet industry reduces supply-chain risk for these sectors and offers manufacturers the ability to co-develop motor and generator designs tailored to the Indian environment.

It also reduces the risk of currency volatility and imported-input costs for EV and renewable-energy OEMs.

LINKING THE VALUE CHAIN

A full rare earth ecosystem cannot flourish through downstream action alone. Without reliable upstream availability or mid-stream separation, magnet manufacturing cannot scale. Conversely, mining and separation become commercially viable only when downstream demand is strong and predictable.

The NCMM builds the upstream and mid-stream pipeline - exploration, mining, processing, recycling and partnerships. The magnet scheme builds downstream scale - oxide to alloy to magnet.

FINAL TAKE

As with all strategic sectors, the rare earth opportunity comes with risks. Chemical separation is environmentally sensitive and requires world-class safeguards. Price volatility in elements like neodymium and dysprosium can influence project

economics. The technological learning curve is steep, and some facilities may require global partnerships or licensing agreements.

Despite all this, there are serious players and listed companies, which are eying this space closely. India's commitment to building a full rare earth and magnet ecosystem reduces long-term supply uncertainty. Domestic availability supports EV, renewable-energy and defence ambitions. Recycling and circular-economy initiatives create future-proof business models. Policy clarity reduces regulatory friction, while incentives reduce capital barriers.

For investors who can identify credible names, this could be good structural story to ride for years to come. Investors must watch for companies building processing capabilities, forming technology partnerships, securing early-stage mining projects or committing to magnet manufacturing facilities.

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LEANER AI

India's IT Giants Are Betting On Gen AI To Modernize Enterprises
While Cutting Headcount And Protecting Margins





enerative AI sparked off a new tech cycle in IT services, becoming a major driver of growth in 2025. "Most enterprises are now aware that AI isn't an add-on, but a foundational capability that will be critical for future growth and competitiveness," observed ISG, a global technology research and advisory firm, in an early October note.

In the past year, Indian IT services' largest companies have been alert to the immediate opportunity in existing and large customer accounts: enterprise modernization. Simply put, clients' in-house systems have a lot of data stored in different formats and obsolete processes. So, IT companies are looking to modernize the clients' systems to make the enterprises ready to harness Gen AI tools.

"A lot of customers are looking at modernization," C Vijayakumar, CEO and Managing Director of HCL Technologies, told research analysts at the company's earnings call for the second quarter of fiscal year 2026 (Q2 FY26) on 13th October.

"Enterprise modernization is additive in terms of overall revenue for the industry," he added. While Gen AI is a tailwind for modernization, this stream is independent of HCLTech's Advanced AI revenue.

Industry leader TCS, which generated \$30 billion in FY25 revenue, also called out 'AI-powered modernization' as a huge opportunity, especially in the banking, financial services, and insurance (BFSI) industry. In FY25, the BFSI sector contributed 37% to TCS' total revenue.

"Many of our global customers have a lot of technology debt that they have carried over the years," said Aarthi Subramanian, Executive Director, President and COO of TCS, at the company's Q2-FY26 earnings call. To address the tech debt, TCS will use GenAI and Agentic AI as powerful tools to understand the legacy code and deliver the new code, she added. "We are seeing an uptick across customers, significantly in BFSI, and expect to replicate this across other verticals," she said.

Infosys, which clocked \$20 billion in FY25 revenue, is also bullish on the modernization opportunity. "Before AI, legacy modernization had a certain time duration and a certain ROI

(return on investment)," noted Salil Parekh, CEO and Managing Director of Infosys, at the company's Q2 FY26 earnings call.

Enterprise AI tools are evolving, with many focused on growth solutions for sales or marketing, as well as solutions for cost reduction and customer support, Parekh explained.

This has dramatically improved the modernization opportunity for Infosys, which will focus on how to deploy enterprise AI to modernize clients' operations, he added.

Overall, the modernization opportunity is about making enterprises ready for AI.

DO MORE WITH FEWER (ENGINEERS)

On the back of AI readiness, the new tech cycle has entered the growth stage, and Indian IT companies have begun delivering more with less people.

A year ago, technology advisory ISG had predicted: GenAI has the potential to reduce manual effort by 45%-55% in areas like coding and testing.

Enterprise investments in 2025 will focus on implementing additional AI and other software that can boost productivity with existing staff without having to add human capacity.

In FY25, HCL Technologies' revenue grew 6.5% to around \$14 billion, but its headcount reduced against the previous

year by 4,061 employees (to 2,23,420 employees). For long, Indian IT firms have talked about this productivity metric as 'non-linear' growth. By August, TCS announced a retrenchment plan to lay off 20,000 employees.

"The 20,000 net head count decline is a factor of voluntary and involuntary attrition," clarified Sudeep Kunnumal, Chief Human Resources Officer, TCS, in the Q2 FY26 earnings call.

In FY25, TCS' 6% growth had seen a net addition of 26,472 employees, compared to Infosys' 4% growth with a net addition of 6,338 employees.

HCLTech's Vijayakumar tackled the productivity question head-on, providing a

long-term forecast by technical areas. "The biggest impact is on the BPO business, which could be as much as 40% to 50%. In SDLC (Software Development Lifecycle), 25% to 30% is doable with a lot of maturity. In IT Ops, application support and maintenance, it will be 10% to 15%, but it also depends on where an enterprise is in the automation journey."

THE UPSHOT

Enterprises are expecting IT firms to deliver more work with fewer human resources and a growing AI quotient.

So if a technology workflow traditionally required 10 people, clients want to know if its IT vendor can do it with five engineers, plus Gen AI. (The

vendor would want to do it with three engineers to enhance margins.) Consequently, the pricing benefits clients expect might begin to reflect in lower annual contract values (ACV) for IT companies. Their operating margins have barely increased when one compares the metric for FY25 with FY23.

The ACV factor is crucial because nearly 40 mega deals (each worth \$100-million in ACV) grossing \$6.4 billion were due for renewal in calendar years 2025 and 2026, according to ISG.

After three financial quarters of calendar year 2025, the good news is that the ACV of mega deals grew year-on-year, but only in the US market by 58%.

Indian IT Services

Operating Margins Have Barely Improved In The Past Two Years

FY 2025	Operating Revenue (\$ Bn)	Y-O-Y Growth (%)	Operating Margin FY25 (%)	Operating Margin FY23 (%)	No Of Employees (FY25)	Growth In Headcount FY25	Attrition Rate (%)
TCS	30	6	24.3	24.1	6,07,979	26,472	13.3
Infosys	19.3	4.2	21.1	21	3,23,578	6,338	14.1
HCL Technologies	13.8	6.5	18.3	18.2	2,23,420	-4,061	13
Wipro	10.5	-2.3	17.1	15.7	2,33,346	732	14.8
Tech Mahindra	6.2	1.9	13.2	15	1,48,731	20,580	11.8
LTI Mindtree	4.5	7	17.1	18	84,307	2,657	14.4

IT Firms With US Headquarters	Operating Revenue (\$ Bn)	Y-O-Y Growth (%)	Operating Margin (%)	No Of Employees	Growth In Headcount FY25	Attrition Rate (%)
Cognizant*	19.7	2	14.7	3,36,800	-10,900	15.9
Accenture**	69.7	7	15.6	7,79,000	5,000	14

*Fiscal Year Ending 31st Dec '24 | **Fiscal Year Ending 31st Aug '25
Source: Annual Reports / Quarterly Filings Of Companies

In contrast, the European Union and Middle East markets have seen ACV decline by 40%.

The US typically contributes more than 45% of Indian IT companies' revenues. But broadly, AI has begun to have a material impact on their pricing ability, according to ISG.

Therefore while the total contract value (TCV) could be large, keep a close eye on the ACV of multi-year mega deals signed by Indian IT companies.

THE AI PROPOSITIONS

In a competitive market, IT vendors from India have begun positioning their AI-led services to developed markets like the US and Europe.

In October, Krithivasan of TCS, articulated its ambition to become "the world's largest AI-led technology services company."

Towards this end, the company has committed \$1 billion to build HyperVault, an AI data centre that will scale to a capacity of up to 1 Giga Watt over seven years.

HyperVault will be funded through a mix of equity from TCS and private equity firm TPG, as well as debt.

The total commitment works out to \$2 billion, with TPG investing nearly \$985 million (₹8,820 crore) for a final shareholding of between 27.5% and 49% in HyperVault.

"If you look at the entire AI stack – starting from

infrastructure as the starting layer, all the way up to the apps and the agentic apps at the most layer – the data centre business gives us the coverage across the AI technology stack," said Aarthi Subramanian of TCS.

"It's a natural extension in terms of what partnerships we are looking at creating with hyperscalers, what services we want to provide to our customers, and this nicely fits in as an adjacency," added Samir Seksaria, CFO of TCS.

Meanwhile, Infosys has taken two strategic frameworks to market: services.ai and client.ai.

"In services.ai, we build a foundation for better business services for our clients by accelerating IT capabilities and operations, both our own and our clients," Satish HC, Chief Delivery Officer of Infosys, told analysts during the Q2 FY26 earnings call.

Its integrated services stack has a composable set of AI services and agents contextualized for client and industry, and integrates human and AI agents to modernize clients' IT services and operations.

"On client.ai, we focus on business transformation to deliver sustained enterprise-wide impact for our clients like revenue growth, efficiency, and productivity improvements," Satish said.

Towards this end, Infosys has developed 22 industry blueprints and more than 400 agents tailored to specific

verticals to accelerate value from AI-led transformation.

Finally, HCLTech is investing in building differentiated IP to accelerate and scale AI adoption for clients.

"We are developing IPs that power transformation across IT, SDLC services, engineering services, BPO services, as well as industry-specific use cases built on top of that intelligence layer," Vijayakumar said.

Interestingly, the flagship offering of HCLTech's advanced AI offerings is the AI Force platform that has been adopted in 47 customer accounts, according to Vijayakumar.

Its latest version will be generally available from January '26, featuring agentic workflows, orchestration, and responsible AI functionalities across IT, software, and business operational services.

The platform has a licensing price list, and tracks developer productivity and cycle times in software development, he told analysts in October.

Between the three largest Indian IT firms, 2026 will be about growing the AI quotient in large transformational deals.

For perspective: since June '23, world's biggest IT services company, Accenture has seen approximately \$11.5 billion in bookings across 11,000 advanced AI projects, with revenue of \$4.8 billion. In this competitive landscape, Indian IT is primed to make Gen AI a major growth driver.

PAYMENT REVOLUTION

**UPI Transformed India From Cash-Dependent To
Digitally Dominant In Under A Decade**



In a post-pandemic world, the idea of how we live has changed materially. Almost every aspect of our lives has been touched upon by technology today in a pronounced way. Today, even people with little education understand and use technology more effectively than their previous generations.

Sample this conversation. A domestic help asks the Google Mic the meaning of the words sent by his employer. And he commands the Google Mic the thoughts he wants to convey, copies the words, and sends them across to his employer. Also, in the evening, he does not forget to do a video call with his wife in his village. Indeed, technology has been adopted at a rapid pace in India.

Among the many technological transformations, one aspect where this shift has been particularly pronounced is the mode of payment. Payment through the Unified Payments Interface (UPI) mode has caught on extremely well in India, fundamentally changing how transactions are conducted. A recent Reserve Bank of India (RBI) report explains this phenomenon in detail, offering insights into what has become one of India's most significant digital success stories. Let us understand the journey of UPI payment in India.

THE BEGINNINGS

The National Payments Corporation of India (NPCI) developed UPI, with 2016 marking the early years of this revolutionary payment system in India. According to media reports, NPCI ensured that UPI services were available with 21 banks in that inaugural year.

Building on this foundation, transactions based on the UPI system began gaining momentum by late 2017, as noted by Penser, a consulting firm specialized in payments and fintech. By 2020, reflecting growing confidence in the platform, the limit of transaction value was increased to ₹2 lakh.

What began as a modest experiment has, over the years, evolved into a key pillar in India's Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI). This transformation didn't happen by chance - it was the result of strategic planning, technological innovation, and widespread user adoption.

The growing importance of UPI in day-to-day transactions naturally caught the attention of India's central bank. The Reserve Bank of India has since studied this journey in considerable detail, and the data reveals a remarkable story.

What the RBI's analysis shows is how a system that began merely as an alternative payment option has evolved into the primary channel for retail transactions, not only boosting digital payments but also firmly placing India among global leaders in real-time payment systems.

The numbers tell a compelling story. Since its launch in 2016, the platform has crossed milestone after milestone.

According to RBI data, UPI transaction volumes surged from 10.79 billion (1,079 crore) in 2019 to a whopping 172.21 billion (17,221 crore) in 2024, amounting to almost a sixteen-fold increase in just five years.

This rapid rise highlights the widespread adoption of the UPI system across income groups, regions, and age segments.

The momentum shows no signs of slowing: in the first half of 2025 alone, UPI processed more than 106 billion (10,637 crore) transactions, underlining its entrenched position in everyday commerce.

But volume is only part of the story. The transaction value of payments through the UPI system has increased

proportionately as well. Even though UPI remains a preferred channel for small-value payments, favourable statistics show that it is increasingly being used for higher-value transfers too.

According to RBI data, the total value of UPI payments rose sharply from ₹18.4 lakh crore in 2019 to ₹246.8 lakh crore in 2024, a jump of 13.4 times.

These figures underscore a key development: according to recent data from the RBI, UPI has become the backbone of India's retail payments ecosystem, accounting for close to 85% of total digital payment volumes in the first half of 2025.

THE JOURNEY: UNDERSTANDING THE SUCCESS

What explains this extraordinary success? An increasing number of studies point to two fundamental factors. One is UPI's well-thought-out structure and design.

The other is the support of the government through favourable policies, which have played a key role in driving rapid adoption.

Starting with the structural advantages, UPI has a simple architecture that works seamlessly whether it involves a bank or a third-party provider.

According to analysts, the use of virtual payment addresses removes any concern related to the sharing of sensitive banking details, addressing a

major security apprehension that often holds people back from digital payments.

Beyond security, it offers real-time, round-the-clock service, a feature that provides tremendous convenience to consumers who are no longer bound by banking hours or holiday schedules.

Equally important has been the policy environment. Sector experts consistently point out that the government's decision to keep peer-to-peer and peer-to-merchant transactions free for users has been critical in removing financial barriers associated with digital payments of any amount.

These continuous supportive government policies, combined with the RBI's incentives for merchant adoption, have encouraged even not-so-technologically savvy consumers to embrace the UPI system.

Beyond these immediate factors, UPI has benefited from strong institutional backing embedded in the broader Digital India vision. The JAM trinity - Jan Dhan accounts, Aadhaar, and mobile connectivity - laid the groundwork for financial inclusion and simultaneously made UPI accessible to a large population across India.

This foundation proved particularly important in extending UPI's reach: even in rural and semi-urban areas, adoption has increased materially, driven largely by direct benefit transfers from government schemes that introduced millions to digital

transactions.

Under RBI guidance, the National Payments Corporation of India has kept pace with this growth by consistently expanding the platform's capabilities.

Innovations such as UPI Lite for low-value payments with minimal connectivity requirements have made the system more inclusive and accessible.

Additionally, features enabling smooth transactions on mobile phones through its server, combined with the linking of credit cards to the UPI network, have further accelerated growth in usage. Through these developments, UPI now serves not only urban, tech-savvy users but also functions as a truly inclusive national platform.

BEYOND PAYMENTS: THE BROADER IMPACT

The impact of UPI's rise, however, extends well beyond payment statistics. An RBI analysis demonstrates that the UPI platform has significantly lowered barriers to formal financial participation in ways that weren't anticipated at its inception.

Transaction data now spans income levels and geographies, enabling even the smallest street vendors to accept digital payments through simple QR codes.

This integration into the formal economy creates transaction records that open doors previously closed - records that can be used to provide access

to credit and other financial services.

In this way, UPI has become a powerful driver of financial inclusion, touching lives that traditional banking struggled to reach.

The economic implications are equally noteworthy. The World Economic Forum estimates that UPI has saved India's economy billions of dollars since its launch by lowering transaction expenses.

Most analysts emphasize that real-time settlements have improved liquidity management for small businesses while reducing the costs associated with handling physical cash. By replacing cash with an instant, secure, and traceable payment system, UPI has catalyzed broader economic changes.

RBI data points to a steady shift towards a less-cash economy, with digital payments now accounting for nearly 99.7% of total transaction volumes - driven primarily by UPI.

Such a transition does more than digitize payments; it enhances transparency, reduces the shadow economy, and strengthens the effectiveness of government policies related to macroeconomic management.

The correlation between UPI adoption and broader economic growth is increasingly well-documented.

Studies point out a strong relationship between rising UPI transaction volumes and

GDP growth, suggesting that the payments infrastructure is not merely facilitating existing economic activity but actively enabling new forms of commerce and entrepreneurship.

On the global stage, UPI's success has become a reference point for real-time payment systems worldwide.

International assessments consistently show that India, driven largely by UPI, now accounts for nearly half of global real-time payment transactions - a remarkable achievement for a system less than a decade old.

The expansion of UPI and RuPay beyond India's borders to countries such as Singapore, the UAE, and France further demonstrates the scalability and resilience of this domestically developed payment infrastructure.

CHALLENGES AHEAD

Yet, despite these substantial achievements, challenges remain that could shape UPI's trajectory in the coming years. Increasing transaction volumes naturally call for constant vigilance against fraud and cybersecurity threats - threats that evolve as quickly as the technology itself.

Then there are persistent challenges of low digital literacy and connectivity in underserved regions, where the promise of digital inclusion has yet to be fully realized.

Perhaps most critically, there is an ongoing need to develop a long-term revenue model that

preserves UPI's free-to-use ethos for small-value transactions while ensuring the sustainability of the infrastructure that supports it.

Addressing these issues will be critical in sustaining UPI's momentum and strengthening its role as the foundation of India's digital payments future.

One final observation helps put UPI's achievement in perspective. Despite its dominance in transaction volume, UPI currently contributes only around 9% of the overall transaction value within the wider payment system in India.

This disparity reveals UPI's current role as the default payment system for small, high-frequency transactions - everything from roadside purchases and auto fares to daily grocery payments. These are the transactions that form the fabric of everyday economic life for most Indians.

However, this may well be just the beginning. As more people grow comfortable with the platform and begin adopting UPI for payments beyond essential items - for larger purchases, investments, and bill payments - UPI's share of total transaction value will almost certainly surge materially from its current 9%.

If that happens, the system that has already transformed how India pays will become even more central to the nation's economic infrastructure, cementing its place as one of the most consequential digital innovations of our time.

BOLLYWOOD

THE REEL GENERATION

WITH 382 MILLION GEN Zs HOLDING THE KEYS TO THE BOX OFFICE, BOLLYWOOD IS FINALLY LEARNING TO SPEAK THEIR LANGUAGE



U

nderstanding your audience is paramount in cinema. Now, making the film you want to make isn't foolhardy, it just increases the uncertainty in an already unpredictable business. To minimize the risk of box office failure, it really helps to understand the demographics you're catering to.

In recent years, like in many sectors, focusing on Generation Z (born between 1996-2010) has become a major trend. Why is this so? This is because this generation will be tomorrow's key consumers. So here's the million-dollar question: Are Hindi filmmakers making enough films for Gen Z audiences? Let's dive in and find out.

THE GEN Z UNIVERSE

Before we explore whether Hindi filmmakers are creating content for Gen Z, we need to understand just how massive this audience is. Is it even worth targeting them? The numbers paint a remarkable picture.

As of 2025, India has close to 382 million Gen Zs - that's 26% of the country's total population. Together with millennials (born after 1981), they make up over 50% of India's population, a proportion expected to stay above 50% through 2030. This isn't just about headcount though.

Gen Z contributes 43% of household consumption, adding about \$860 billion (₹72 lakh crore) annually, with spending projected to hit \$1.8 trillion by 2035.

The work landscape tells an equally compelling story. Around 27%-35% of Gen Z participates in gig or freelance work, with over 50% interested in freelancing. They represent 88% of investors under 30 and, along with millennials, dominate 86%-90% of India's tech workforce. By the end of the current year, Gen Z is expected to make up 27% of India's overall workforce.

Also, according to a Snap Inc & BCG report, the Gen Z population is projected to drive \$1.8 trillion in direct spending by the year 2035. And they're digital natives through and through. More than 98% of Indian Gen Zers use social media daily, with 78% using Instagram to discover and research brands they wish

to purchase.

WHAT MAKES GEN Z TICK?

This generation consumes information differently. They turn to social media platforms like Instagram and YouTube for news, fashion updates, and career guidance - not traditional search engines.

Short-form video formats like Instagram Reels and YouTube Shorts, along with meme culture, shape how they communicate and interpret social and political developments around them.

Unlike millennials who championed work-life balance, Gen Z wants work-life integration. Flexible schedules and remote working options are in fact non-negotiable for them.

When it comes to shopping, they're remarkably value-conscious, using AI-driven tools to find the best deals and staying open to high-quality alternatives over premium and luxury brands.

Instead of saving up for one big luxury purchase, they prefer "micro-luxuries" like premium beverages or specialized skincare.

There's also been a notable rise in early financial participation among Gen Z, with many using broking platforms to invest in stocks and mutual funds at younger ages than previous generations ever did.

Culturally, Gen Z maintains an interesting balance. While globally connected, they hold

onto a strong sense of Indian cultural identity, consuming more regional-language content in Tamil, Telugu, and Punjabi.

They value authenticity over highly polished or stylized presentation, especially on social media.

And mental health? It's a major priority for this generation.

ARE FILMMAKERS READY FOR GEN Z?

There's mixed opinion among producers and industry observers about whether Hindi filmmakers truly consider Gen Z audiences when making films.

But recently, there's been growing awareness about this demographic, given its sheer size. Recent studies reveal clear patterns in what Indian Gen Z audiences want from films.

In the year 2025, an estimated 77% of Indian Gen Z audiences consumed content translated from other languages - far more than older generations.

They're watching Korean, Spanish, and other international films without hesitation, while older audiences still prefer local-language productions.

Gen Z rejects nepotism outright and prefers independent voices telling stories that reflect diverse social realities.

Their relationship with theatres

is particularly telling. Unlike Gen X (born 1965-1980) or Baby Boomers (born 1946-1964), who'll go to theatres for conventional drama, Gen Z only goes for experiences they can't get at home - high-impact, immersive viewing.

They love premium large-format screenings like IMAX and Dolby, and theaters with enhanced amenities like dine-in services.

Films without visual spectacle or social appeal? They'll watch those at home on streaming platforms.

Movie going is fundamentally a social activity for Gen Z. An estimated 82% attend theaters primarily with friends, compared to just 61% of Baby Boomers.

They're drawn to anime, gaming-related narratives, and horror - reflecting broader global entertainment trends.

And they discover films largely through social media, with short-form clips and recommendations from digital creators driving their choices.

THE SUCCESS STORIES

Analysts say Hindi filmmakers are gradually becoming aware of these Gen Z characteristics.

The recent success of Bollywood films like Saiyaara, Mahavatar Narsimha, and Ek Deewane ki Dewaniyat proves that when themes resonating with Gen Z are presented authentically, they lap it up in theaters.

Take Saiyaara, for example. For a long time, Gen Z audiences were starved for young romantic films that spoke to their sensibilities.

Saiyaara incorporated many tropes from the South Korean content Gen Z has consumed for years - traumatic pasts, sacrifice, commitment in a commitment-phobic age, caring relationships, mental health, and troubled family dynamics. Indian Gen Z audiences immediately connected with these elements.

WHAT'S NEXT?

Looking ahead, Hindi filmmakers have a strong line-up of films likely to appeal to Gen Z audiences.

The Ramayana taps into Indianness and rootedness, while upcoming movies such as Toxic and Love & War bring back romance.

Nagzilla offers the horror genre they crave, and Dhrishyam 3 delivers authenticity and franchise value. The movie Raja Sahab provides multi-genre appeal, and King explores family values.

These films contain elements that resonate with Gen Z sensibilities, suggesting that Bollywood is starting to understand and cater to this undeniable demographic.

The question now isn't whether filmmakers should focus on Gen Z - it's whether they can keep up with this generation's evolving tastes and cater to their needs.

CANE CONUNDRUM

Rising Production Costs And Falling Prices
Threaten ₹2,000 Crore Sugarcane Arrears As
Mills Seek Policy Intervention



A

familiar cycle is repeating in the sugar sector. The industry is facing excess supply, raising fears of a fall in sugar prices. As seen in the past, lower prices could make sugar production unviable for mills and lead to a build-up of cane arrears owed to farmers.

Current ex-mill sugar prices are hovering around ₹36-₹37 per kilogram, way below their cost of production. There is already news of a 5% fall in sugar prices in key sugar markets in India since the beginning of the marketing year in October. There are also reports of cane arrears already reaching around the ₹2,000 crore level in the state of Maharashtra itself.

Latest data suggest that the expected sugar surplus by the end of the ongoing 2025-26 season (October to September) is comfortably above the normal reserve stock required for domestic consumption.

As of 15th Dec '25, all-India sugar production has reached 7.82 million tonnes (after diversion for ethanol), registering healthy growth of about 28% over the 6.13 million tonnes produced during the same period last year.

For the whole season, industry lobby Indian Sugar & Bio-Energy Manufacturers Association (ISMA) has projected gross sugar production of 34.35 million tonnes (before diversion to ethanol), up by around 16% from around 30 million tonnes production in SS25.

With an opening balance of 5 million tonnes (from the previous season), estimated domestic consumption of 28.5 million tonnes, and diversion towards ethanol of around 3.4 million tonnes, the closing balance for the 2025-26 season is estimated at around 6 million tonnes after factoring in exports of 1.5 million tonnes.

Clearly excess supply seems to be the culprit for the worsening of the fundamentals of the sugar sector. A similar surplus situation was seen in 2018-19 where severe price distress arose due to excess domestic and global sugar stocks, leading to ex-mill prices falling below production costs and resulting in substantial cane arrears.

Given similar conditions, what can help resolve the current crisis? There are three areas that can aid the profitability of sugar companies: higher sugar realization, higher ethanol prices, and higher export quota.

SUGAR MSP HIKE DEMAND

There have been calls by industry bodies for an upward revision of the Minimum Selling Price (MSP) of sugar to upwards of ₹41 per kilogram to aid the profitability of sugar mills. The Central government is considering an increase in sugar MSP, but the actual quantum is awaited.

To set the context, back in June 2018-19 to address the crisis in the sector, the government introduced an MSP for sugar. MSP was fixed at ₹31 per kilogram of sugar at the factory gate.

This ensured that no mill could sell sugar below the MSP, thus setting the floor for prices. With this, the industry's fundamentals improved.

While the MSP has remained unchanged at ₹31 per kg since its last revision in early 2019, the cost of production has risen sharply since then due to continuous increases in cane prices and other costs.

For instance, the fair and remunerative price (FRP) - the mandatory minimum price sugar mills must pay sugarcane farmers for cane - has increased from ₹275 per quintal for the sugar season 2019-20 to ₹355 per quintal now. To the FRP, various states add their own State Advised

Prices (SAP), which further increases the cost of cane for sugar mills.

As a consequence, the effective cane price for mills is currently around ₹391 per quintal, resulting in a sugar production cost of about ₹41.66 per kilogram (including other costs).

On the other hand, current ex-mill sugar prices are hovering around ₹36-₹37 per kilogram. Clearly, mills make losses if MSP is not hiked. The government is expected to come out with a decision on the MSP hike in the next few weeks.

EXPORTS QUOTA

To contain the distress in the sugar sector, the government recently permitted the sector to export 1.5 million tonnes of sugar in SS 2025-26.

Given the higher surplus expected, the industry has requested the government to allow an additional 1 million tonnes for exports.

Diversifying excess sugar to the export market has been a great source for managing cash for sugar mills in the past. It is worth pointing out that India was the world's second-largest sugar exporter a couple of years back.

The country exported more than 6 million tonnes of sugar each year for five years until SS 2022-23. However, a drought led the government to ban sugar exports in SS 2023-24.

In SS 2024-25, the

government allowed only 1 million tonnes to be shipped overseas, while only about 80% of that quota was used due to lower demand.

While global sugar prices have a lower bias right now, with the rupee breaching the psychological barrier of 90 against the dollar, Indian sugar could become competitive in the international market going ahead.

ETHANOL PRICE REVISION

India has achieved the 20% ethanol (E20) blending target five years ahead of the original 2030 schedule (blending was merely 1.53% in 2014).

It may be remembered that the country's ethanol blending program initially started with only cane as feedstock, and only much later were other feedstocks like grains allowed to produce ethanol.

The logic to sacrifice sugar for ethanol production was to handle the surplus sugar situation in the sector.

India is eventually expected to adopt E25, E27, and E30 in the long run. Given the outlook, the sugar industry has collectively invested over ₹40,000 crore to build distillery capacities.

However, there is a small issue here: while FRP and other costs have risen, ethanol prices have not been revised proportionately for the last three years.

To counter higher sugar

surplus in the system and aid profitability, the industry is demanding an upward revision of ethanol procurement prices for the 2025-26 Ethanol Supply Year.

The industry is also demanding higher ethanol allocation to the sugar industry as compared to grain-based distilleries.

At present, only about 28% of the total allocation is extended to the sugar industry. This has left a significant portion of existing capacity underutilized, which has added to the financial stress on sugar mills.

Price revision and higher allocation in ethanol blending can help optimize capacities and strengthen the industry's contribution to the national ethanol blending programme.

IN A NUTSHELL

The stress in the sugar sector is real. Average ex-mill sugar prices have fallen significantly below the cost of production, creating serious financial strain for mills.

As an agriculture-based industry supporting over 5 crore cane farmers and their families, it is crucial to ensure operational sustainability and timely cane payments. The industry needs profitable revenue generation to sustain its operations.

With the re-emergence of excess supply in the 2025-26 sugar season, the fate of the sugar industry now hinges on a few key government decisions expected in the coming weeks.



SPONSORING SUCCESS

Corporate sponsorship is creating high-performance centres and competitive pathways for India's athletes and sporting community

India is in the middle of a quiet shift in the way sport is supported and developed. Much of this change is happening outside stadiums, in training centres, community programmes and institutional partnerships that aim to give athletes more reliable pathways than they had a decade ago. Corporate involvement forms one part of this evolving landscape, and while it is not a silver bullet, it has influenced how certain sports are organized, funded and experienced.

The change is visible in several indicators. Non-cricket sports sponsorship has crossed ₹1,200 crore, almost doubling in five years. A significant share of India's recent international medal winners have trained in centres supported by private organizations. Digital viewership for Olympic and league formats has grown steadily, suggesting that audiences are open to engaging with a wider set of sports.

These trends point to a broader transformation driven by a mix of government programmes, federations that are improving their structures, athlete advocacy and, in specific areas, corporate-funded initiatives that fill gaps in training, exposure and infrastructure.

A SHIFT FROM SPONSORSHIP TO STRUCTURE

Earlier, corporate participation tended to focus on brand visibility. Today, in several sports, it takes a more structured form. This shift is not uniform across the board, and it certainly does not replace the role of national federations or public institutions. What it does is create pockets of stability where athletes gain access to training environments that are otherwise difficult to sustain.

Training academies now integrate sports science, data analysis, nutritional planning and physiotherapy. These are not luxuries but essential elements of high-performance training, and their availability has helped athletes prepare on more equal footing with global competitors.

Domestic circuits created through partnerships have increased match exposure and reduced the financial strain of travelling abroad to earn ranking points. Grassroots programmes have emerged in places once overlooked, allowing early talent

identification in smaller cities and towns.

The intent behind these efforts varies. Some are driven by long-term commitments to athlete development while others are linked to brand purpose or community engagement. What matters is that athletes in certain sports now have access to more predictable support systems than before.

THE SQUASH EXAMPLE AND HCL'S ROLE

Squash offers a clear view of how structured support can influence a sport that historically struggled with visibility. When HCL began working with the Squash Rackets Federation of India in 2016, the sport already had motivated players and coaches but lacked consistent domestic competition and access to international-level training.

The introduction of a steady PSA Challenger circuit in India changed the equation. Athletes could now earn ranking points without the prohibitive cost of international travel. Over the years, participation in junior and senior categories increased, and tournaments began attracting players from several countries.

The system did not rely solely on corporate funding. It depended on SRFI's organizational backbone, state-level academies, dedicated coaches and families who continued to invest heavily in their children's sporting journeys. HCL's role was to strengthen

existing efforts rather than overshadow them.

Young players such as Velavan Senthilkumar, Abhay Singh and Anahat Singh benefited from this more predictable environment. Their progress is a reflection of multiple stakeholders working in tandem. The fact that India now fields more players in the global top 50 than it once did points to the value of consistency in planning, not the influence of any single entity.

HIGH PERFORMANCE CENTRES AND THE JSW MODEL

In sports like wrestling, boxing and track and field, high-performance centres have added another layer of support. The Inspire Institute of Sport in Bellary, set up by JSW Sports, has become a key training site for athletes preparing for major competitions. It offers access to nutritionists, psychologists, physiotherapists and sports scientists. This does not replace national camps or public investment. It complements them.

During the Tokyo Olympic cycle, several athletes trained at IIS alongside national programmes. Wrestler Bajrang Punia, for instance, used the biomechanics lab there to refine specific movements. A young boxer from Manipur improved dramatically after structured exposure to sports science and went on to win national titles. These stories show that when different institutions collaborate, athletes benefit.

Still, this model works only when federations, state programmes and community systems remain strong. Corporate centres cannot and should not become the primary training grounds for the country. Their value lies in offering additional resources where gaps exist.

LEGACY INSTITUTIONS AND THE TATA CONTRIBUTION

Long before the current surge of interest in sports, the Tata Group had invested in football and archery. The Tata Football Academy and the Tata Archery Academy became known for structured training and long-term athlete development.

Deepika Kumari's trajectory, from a small village in Jharkhand to becoming world number one in recurve archery, is often linked to her time at the academy. But even in her case, it was a combination of state support, federation frameworks, family determination and institutional backing that shaped her career.

The Tata model is a reminder that sports ecosystems grow when multiple actors invest steadily over time rather than through sporadic interventions or publicity-driven initiatives.

WHY CORPORATES ENTER NICHE SPORTS

Many corporates today are choosing to support sports that historically received less attention. This shift is partly due to the lower barriers to entry. A single training centre or competition circuit in a

niche sport can have a visible impact on both participation and performance. For companies working under CSR mandates, sports offer a way to build community engagement, support youth development and contribute to social mobility.

At the same time, it is important to recognize that corporate involvement does not automatically create grassroots depth. In several cases, athletes still bear the bulk of the financial burden. Travel costs, equipment expenses and training fees remain challenging, especially for families from rural or low-income backgrounds. Corporate programmes help, but they do not eliminate systemic issues.

THE EXPANDING SPORTING ECONOMY

The broader sports economy is also evolving. High-performance centres create employment for coaches, analysts, physiotherapists and nutrition specialists. Domestic leagues generate work in event management, broadcasting and digital media. International tournaments hosted in India boost tourism and hospitality. These ripple effects contribute to a growing professional ecosystem.

A Deloitte assessment valued India's sports industry at over ₹15,000 crore, driven increasingly by non-cricket sports. However, this growth is uneven. Some sports have thriving commercial pathways while others still depend largely on federation budgets

and small grants. Corporate involvement amplifies development but does not replace the need for larger national investment.

STORIES FROM THE FIELD

A 19-year-old squash player from Chennai once thought of quitting as he could not afford the cost of international travel. The rise of a domestic circuit allowed him to earn ranking points at home. He is now ranked inside the PSA top 100.

A wrestler from Haryana who trained barefoot in a small akhada now uses motion-capture technology to refine her technique, thanks to access to a high-performance centre. She still trains in her village part of the year because that remains her core environment.

A young archer from Jharkhand nearly abandoned her sport because she could

not pay for equipment. Entry into a structured training academy changed her trajectory, but her success continues to rely on multiple sources of support.

These examples show that athlete journeys are rarely shaped by a single institution. Real progress comes from the combined strength of federations, corporates, state programmes, coaches, academies and families who stand behind athletes through every setback.

A BALANCED PATH FORWARD

India's sporting future will depend on better governance within federations, more consistent investment in school and community-level sport and stronger talent identification systems. Corporate participation can support these efforts, but it cannot substitute long-term public investment or

institutional reform.

What is emerging is a more collaborative model in which different actors share responsibility. Corporates strengthen certain links in the chain. Federations build pathways. Governments create access. Families and communities continue to nurture raw talent.

When these forces work together, athletes gain the foundation they need to compete globally.

India is not becoming a sporting nation because corporates stepped in. It is becoming one because more people and institutions than ever before are working to build a reliable system. Corporate involvement is simply one part of this broader transformation, and its impact is most useful when it aligns with long-term development of athletes.

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DIGITAL DEFENCE



SCAMMERS ARE GETTING SMARTER, BUT SO CAN YOU: DIGITAL AWARENESS IS YOUR BEST FIREWALL AGAINST FRAUD



The digital world has evolved into an inseparable part of modern life - a parallel reality that shapes how we work, communicate, invest, and transact.

From managing finances to shopping online, an ever-growing share of our daily activities now takes place in the digital realm. This convenience, however, comes with a steep trade-off: greater exposure to cyber threats.

Cybercriminals thrive on a combination of human vulnerability and technological loopholes. Their reach now extends beyond individuals to even the most fortified corporations, where multimillion-dollar cybersecurity systems have not always been enough to prevent sophisticated breaches.

Despite layers of encryption, controls, and firewalls, organizations around the world continue to face data leaks that compromise sensitive client information and erode public trust.

For individuals, the risk is far more personal - and often devastating. Cyber fraudsters increasingly target unsuspecting users, manipulating them into revealing confidential information or authorizing fraudulent transactions designed to inflict financial loss.

The danger multiplies when corporate or website databases are compromised; a single breach can expose vast troves of personal data, allowing criminals to impersonate real users and execute convincing cyberattacks.

The gravity of the issue is starkly reflected in India's position on the World Cybercrime Index, where the country ranks 10th globally, underscoring the growing scale of the threat.

According to data from the National Cyber Crime Reporting Portal (NCRP), India reported 3.64 million incidents of financial fraud in FY24, a sharp rise from 2.44 million cases the previous year.

The financial toll has been staggering, with losses surging to ₹228.13 billion in FY24, compared to just ₹5.51 billion in FY21. These numbers not only highlight the explosive growth of digital financial crime but also reflect how rapidly fraud tactics are

evolving in sophistication and precision.

THE NEW AGE OF DECEPTION

Today's cybercriminals operate with the finesse of seasoned professionals.

Their arsenal includes social engineering, deepfakes, phishing, identity theft, and QR-code scams - tools that exploit both technology and human psychology.

In this environment, awareness is the first and most critical line of defence.

Protecting one's digital and financial well-being demands constant alertness, not only to the technologies we use but also to the subtle manipulations that criminals employ.

IMPERSONATION SCAMS

Phishing / Vishing / Smishing

Fraudsters often impersonate trusted figures such as bank officials, government officers, or even friends in distress to trick individuals into revealing confidential information.

These deceptions take many forms - a phishing email, a vishing call, or a smishing text - all engineered to provoke instant, emotional reactions.

A phishing email may look perfectly legitimate, urging the recipient to "verify" or "update" their account.

The moment one enters personal or financial details on the fake site, the fraudster gains access and drains funds.

In vishing scams, callers pose as bank representatives investigating “suspicious activity,” convincing victims to share OTPs or account details under the guise of verification.

One of the most rampant versions is the KYC update scam, where criminals claim an account will be frozen unless details are updated immediately.

Victims are lured into downloading malicious apps or clicking unsafe links, handing over control of their data and devices.

Another infamous example is the “Nigerian Prince” scam, one of the oldest and most enduring online frauds.

The scheme begins with an emotional email from a supposed wealthy individual or royal family member seeking help to transfer a large inheritance, promising a generous reward in return.

The victim is first asked to pay small “administrative” or “legal” fees, followed by escalating requests supported by forged documents and official-looking correspondence.

In reality, there is no inheritance - only a well-crafted illusion that drains the victim’s resources over time.

Deepfake Fraud

The rise of AI-generated deepfakes has taken fraud to unprecedented levels of realism. Unlike manipulated photos of the past, today’s

deepfakes are nearly indistinguishable from authentic videos. Recently, a 71-year-old retired doctor in Hyderabad lost over ₹20 lakh after watching a deepfake video of the Finance Minister endorsing a fictitious investment opportunity. The line between real and fake has never been blurrier - or more dangerous.

SOCIAL ENGINEERING

Social engineering is especially insidious because it exploits psychology - using fear, urgency, or the lure of easy money to pressure victims into acting before they think.

Digital Arrest Scams

A growing number of victims receive intimidating video calls from individuals posing as police or government officials, complete with fake IDs and arrest warrants. Falsely accused of crimes like money laundering or drug trafficking, they are coerced into transferring large sums to “resolve” the matter - a classic case of fear-driven manipulation.

Easy Money Scams

Social media platforms and online forums are increasingly used to promote fraudulent job offers promising easy money for minimal effort. Ads often claim individuals can earn substantial amounts from home with no special skills required - only internet access. Victims are asked to pay an upfront “registration” or “training” fee to access the job or complete a short introductory course. Once the

payment is made, the recruiters disappear, leaving the victim with financial loss and, in some cases, compromised personal data.

Prize Scams

These usually begin with an unexpected message or call claiming the recipient’s mobile number has won a bumper prize or lucky draw.

The catch? To claim the reward, the “winner” must first pay a processing or registration fee.

What appears to be a stroke of good fortune quickly turns into a classic con — one of the oldest tricks still deceiving unsuspecting individuals.

DIGITAL PAYMENT AND TECHNICAL FRAUDS

UPI And QR Code Scam

As digital payments become second nature, fraudsters have found new ways to exploit trust. Scammers send fake payment links or QR codes, convincing victims that they need to enter their UPI PIN to receive money. In reality, this authorizes a debit from their account, resulting in instant financial loss.

Remote Access Scams

A growing number of scams now begin with a request for “technical help.” Fraudsters pose as bank representatives or customer service executives and ask individuals to download screen-sharing or remote-access apps to fix KYC issues or troubleshoot payment errors.

Once installed, these apps hand over full control of the victim's device, enabling scammers to siphon money undetected.

Card Skimming And Cloning

While card skimming and cloning have declined due to chip-based cards, they remain a threat at compromised ATMs or payment terminals where hidden devices capture card details.

INVESTMENT AND ONLINE SHOPPING SCAMS

Investment Scams

Cybercriminals are leveraging technology to create convincing fake investment platforms, often promoted through social media and deepfake endorsements from public figures.

Many operate as Ponzi schemes, promising high returns before vanishing with investors' money.

Fake E-Commerce And Delivery Frauds

Online shoppers are frequently targeted through counterfeit shopping sites or messages claiming issues with package deliveries. Victims are urged to click malicious links or pay small "re-delivery" or "rescheduling" fees.

These tactics are designed to steal payment details, personal information, or both - turning a simple online purchase or parcel notification into a costly data breach.

PROTECTION FROM

CYBERCRIMINAL ATTACKS

Across all forms of financial fraud, one pattern stands out: the manipulation of trust, greed, and urgency. Scammers prey on emotions like fear, curiosity, empathy, or temptation, making even the most cautious person vulnerable.

While awareness is essential, healthy scepticism remains your strongest defence in the fight against cybercriminals.

KEY LEARNINGS TO STAY PROTECTED

- No legitimate institution will ever ask for sensitive information over phone, email, or SMS. If you receive such a request, you must verify directly through official sources.
 - Treat every unexpected link or download request as a red flag. Scammers often use urgency such as "your account will be frozen" or "a friend needs emergency funds." Pause, verify, and never react impulsively.
 - Spot tell-tale signs of phishing or smishing. Poor grammar, odd phrasing, or suspicious email addresses.
- Never click unfamiliar links or open attachments as they can instantly compromise your device.
- Take ownership of your digital security. Use strong, unique passwords; avoid personal references; and don't store them in browsers. Instead, rely on a reputable password manager.

- Keep your software updated. Regular updates strengthen your system against malware and other threats.

- Enable Multi-Factor Authentication (MFA). It adds a critical layer of verification beyond passwords.

- Monitor your accounts actively. Set up alerts for all transactions to catch and report suspicious activity immediately.

- Avoid public Wi-Fi for financial or sensitive activity. Unsecured networks are entry points for cybercriminals and their fraudulent activities.

IN A NUTSHELL

As the digital ecosystem expands, so does the threat landscape. While corporations may recover from financial fraud with systems and insurance in place, for individuals, a single breach can wipe out years of savings and security.

Cybercriminals are constantly evolving, exploiting not only system vulnerabilities but also the frailties of human emotion - trust, fear, and haste. In this reality, cybersecurity literacy is no longer optional; it is the bare minimum.

The real shield lies in constant vigilance, questioning the unusual, resisting emotional triggers, and verifying before acting.

The bottom line is simple: stay alert, stay sceptical, and remember that staying digitally secure begins and ends with you.

REDEFINING STANDARDS

Fresh entrants in the mutual fund industry are pushing legacy players to sharpen their focus on cost efficiency, clarity, and investor outcomes



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or decades, India's mutual fund industry expanded steadily but predictably. New fund houses did enter from time to time, yet the market remained dominated by a familiar set of legacy players. Distribution networks were entrenched, schemes looked increasingly alike, and scale mattered more than originality. Over the past three years, however, that equilibrium has been disrupted.

A new generation of asset management companies has entered the industry in the past two-three years, and their arrival is not merely additive. These fund houses are emerging at a time when investor behaviour, regulation, and technology have shifted decisively. The result is not just more schemes on offer, but a subtle re-engineering of how mutual funds are built, priced, and consumed in India.

Rather than viewing these entrants individually, it is more useful to examine the broader forces that brought them in, the distinct models they represent, and what they mean for investors.

HOW THE NEW FUND HOUSES ARE ENTERING THE MARKET

Most recent mutual fund launches are different from the earlier launch cycles. Previous new AMC entrants followed an established path, building distributor relationships; marketing an equity fund; and then hopefully using brand awareness and performance to do the work for them.

Newer AMCs are approaching the market with a more comprehensive and formalized plan, shaped by not only the dramatic shifts in investor behaviour in the last few years, but also the changes in technology-based distribution methods, as well as the increasing sensitivity of investors to Cost and Transparency.

Companies such as Bajaj Finserv Mutual Fund and JioBlackRock Mutual Fund bring the efficiencies associated with established financial or digital ecosystems that provide them with an immediate distribution advantage, and allow them to leverage existing customer relationships and utilize the efficiencies of digital platforms and data infrastructure rather than having to build trust via traditional distribution networks. However, investors have higher expectations and essentially expect high

risk management, competitive pricing, and strong governance.

THE IMPACT ON INVESTORS: VISIBLE AND INVISIBLE

For investors, the most obvious impact of new fund houses is greater choice. But the more meaningful effects are indirect and structural. The presence of low-cost passive funds alongside mainstream active schemes and differentiated active strategies has improved benchmarking across the industry.

This has encouraged healthier portfolio construction. Funds are increasingly selected for clearly defined roles, core market exposure, alpha-seeking satellite positions, or risk-managed allocations rather than being chosen purely on recent performance or brand familiarity. Over time, this shift reduces churn, improves investor behaviour, and aligns portfolios more closely with long-term goals.

All investors, regardless of how much money they have invested in new AMCs have benefited from the actions taken by established firms. Due to increased competition in India's mutual fund industry, established companies have started to communicate in a clearer manner how their funds are invested.

Therefore, in an already mature market, competition acts as a "discipline" for the market, creating an environment where product quality, transparency, and engagement are continually

enhanced. Perhaps the most subtle change is cultural. New entrants are normalizing the idea that good investing does not always mean chasing outperformance.

For many investors, discipline, predictability, and alignment with personal preferences now matter as much as beating the benchmark. This shift is especially relevant for long-term savers, for whom consistency and behaviour often matter more than marginal return optimization.

WHAT THIS MEANS FOR THE INDUSTRY'S NEXT PHASE

Over the past three years, the entry of new Asset Management Companies (AMCs) signifies that the mutual fund industry in India is currently transitioning from rapid growth phase towards a deeper evolution phase. The

mutual fund industry will continue to grow within the market due to increased participation from Indian households and financializing savings. Gathering assets alone will no longer be an adequate measure of success however.

Going forward, fund houses will be evaluated based upon the level of clarity regarding purpose, cost efficiency, portfolio construction discipline, and outcomes achieved for the investor. This is a net positive trend for regulatory bodies as this is an indication that a more competitive & diverse AMC environment achieves the goals of investor protection and market development. Therefore, fund houses need to move forward and continually innovate; to simply maintain the status quo is not an option.

HOW INVESTORS SHOULD ENGAGE WITH NEW FUND HOUSES

The new mutual fund companies in India are entering the market just as investors are more aware and able to make informed decisions and more cost conscious and digital savvy than ever. Their importance is not in the products themselves but in how competitive they will force the rest of the industry to become.

As competitions are increasing and more companies entering into India's ₹80-lakh crore mutual fund industry, the ultimate benefit will go to investors by helping them make better decisions, receiving lower fees, and having a stronger focus on achieving the maximum long-term results from their investments.





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A spotlight on the real
journeys, insights,
and breakthroughs of
trailblazing mutual fund
distributors

MR. TIRTH GALA
Mutual Fund
Distributor

MR. SACHIN PAREKH
Mutual Fund
Distributor

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Welcome to the Billionaire Code podcast series where we meet select Mutual Fund Distributors (MFDs) who have accumulated assets under management (AUM) of over ₹100 crores and have been true companions in the wealth journeys of many families.

In the sixth episode of the series, we meet Mr. Tirth Gala, a CA ranker who joined his father's mutual fund distribution business at 25, helping it grow from ₹550 crores to ₹1,250 crores in under two years while finding deep fulfillment in positively impacting clients' financial lives.

Let's hear his success story in his own words. Edited excerpts from Mr. Tirth Gala's interview with Mr. Rakesh Bhandari, Director, Nirmal Bang.



Rakesh Bhandari: You Achieved An All India Rank In CA. Was There Peer Pressure To Join Your Father? When Your Friends Were Joining Big Four Firms With ₹15-₹20 Lakh Packages Or Even More, Why Did You Decide To Become An MFD And Join Your Father Instead?

Tirth Gala: I think this decision was made long ago, even before I completed my CA. Since I was in 8th standard, I had dropped science and studied only commerce because that's what interested me. Gradually over time, when I went to college and was studying for CA, I realized I was actually more interested in finance and investments. Of course, my father had an established business. He used to tell me about his experiences, his journey, which seemed very interesting and fascinating. So I decided I should try it out rather than just going for a fixed job, because that option

would always be there.

Rakesh Bhandari: Tell Me About Your First Meeting. Do You Remember Any Impactful Meeting, A Eureka Moment?

Tirth Gala: I don't remember the first meeting. It was a long time ago, and when I started, we went on a drive to meet all clients in one month, so everything was happening very fast. But I think the first time we went, meetings would usually start with dad introducing me. All the clients were very old clients. They respected and loved him a lot. They would tell me how grateful they were that dad helped them so much with everything. That felt really good.

I remember one client - when we met for the first time, they had prepared a gift for me because I was coming to them for the first time. That really touched me, and that's when I actually realized how much impact we're making on people's lives. The love and blessings we're receiving - it's absolutely phenomenal.

One meeting happened quite recently, about five to six months ago. I met a client who had just retired, and most of his assets were stuck in real estate. When he got some liquid money, I told him, "Let's keep this safe for now. When you liquidate some real estate, then we'll plan for long-term investing." Three to four months later when I met him again, he was quite stressed. He told me he only had a limited amount of money in the bank, no property had sold, and he didn't understand what to do or where money would come from.

So I told him, "Sir, the money you gave us, we've kept it in liquid funds. Whenever you need it, just tell us. We'll liquidate it and you can use that money. You at least have a runway of 1.5 to 2 years." You could see the stress just disappearing from his face, and he was so happy. He said, "Wow, thank you so much." I told him, "Sir, I didn't do anything- it's your money. We just kept it safe." But that impact, that happiness, the stress just disappearing - that's a feeling I don't think I'll ever forget.

Rakesh Bhandari: How Did You Do It? Did You

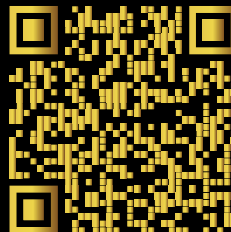


Join Immediately After CA Or Work Somewhere Else First?

Tirth Gala: First I needed to know whether I could actually do this field - investments, finance - and whether my interest would sustain. And of course, when I completed CA, there was also a desire to work in a big corporate, to do a job. So I joined a large wealth management firm. I worked there for about 1.5 years. After that, dad was saying he also wanted to retire. He'd reached an age where he'd been working for a long time. So then I decided to join dad.

Rakesh Bhandari: When You Joined - CA Was Completed In 2021, You Joined Him In 2023. What Was The AUM At That Time?

Tirth Gala: At that time I think we were somewhere around ₹500-₹550 crores...



To access the full interview, please scan the QR code provided or tune into Nirmal Bang's YouTube channel @NirmalBangGroup.

In the seventh episode of the series, we met Mr. Sachin Parekh, who shared how he turned curiosity into a ₹700+ Cr AUM practice – without chasing fancy products, hype or shortcuts. Let's hear his success story in his own words. Edited excerpts from Mr. Sachin Parekh's interview with Mr. Rakesh Bhandari, Director, Nirmal Bang.



Rakesh Bhandari: Welcome, Sachin Parekh Ji, To The Billionaire Code Series. You Are Our First Guest Who Has Completed The CFP Certification. We'll Discuss How Important CFP Is For An MFD Later. First, Tell Us About Your Journey. How Did You Decide To Become An MFD, And What Led You To Join The CFP Program?

Sachin Parekh: Namaskar. Thank you for having me on the program. My investment journey started at a very young age. My grandfather used to invest in the stock market, and because of him, I developed an interest from early on. During school, when I was still studying, I had started my mother's investment, and since then I had what you can call curiosity for the market. When I was completing my studies, I eventually had to join the family business. But my interest was towards the market. So I eventually started the mutual fund distribution business in 2004.

Rakesh Bhandari: So How Did You Learn About The Market? Coming From A Gujarati Family, How Were People Around You Learning About It? I Mean, How Did This Interest Suddenly Develop?

Sachin Parekh: You can understand it like this - investment ran in the blood. As I mentioned, my grandfather was the influence. He wasn't formally educated; he studied only till third or fourth standard, but he had tremendous knowledge about the stock market. Which stocks to buy, which to avoid - he used to ask me for prices. I lived in Bombay, he was in Madhya Pradesh; so he would track what they call price movements. How prices were

changing, what the price was a year ago, what it is now, so our value has become this much. That was an interest factor, and plus, who doesn't like to make money? That was definitely a reason. When I realized I could do this and help someone at the same time... One client from our family business told me, "Sachin Parekh, this is a good thing for you. You're not made for this industry. You should explore this." So that's when I got the kick I needed - the realization that I should explore this path.

Rakesh Bhandari: So You Received Feedback That You're Better At This, And You Should Pursue It.

Sachin Parekh: Yes. Because I was also guiding them – "Sir, you should do this, do that." So then he asked me, "Brother, what are you doing in this business? Come to the market."

Rakesh Bhandari: So How Did You Start Mutual Fund Distribution?

Sachin Parekh: The main reason for starting mutual fund distribution was the thought process around making money and how it could be delivered to people, how you can help them, and obviously I also needed work. That was the main reason, because I didn't want to stay in the family business. That wasn't my area of interest.

Rakesh Bhandari: You Started Mutual Fund Distribution With An Engineering Background, Without Knowing Much About Finance. Did You Feel You Should Get Another Degree? Is That When You Thought About Doing CFP?

Sachin Parekh: See, coming from an engineering background, I had quite a lot of knowledge about numbers and finance. When CFP was launched in India around 2007 and started gaining momentum, I studied what CFP offers - how it gives a mutual fund distributor a new thought process and avenue. That's why I pursued CFP. What I learned from it was how to look at goals, how to do clients' retirement planning, taxation planning, investment planning. The knowledge of thinking in a scientific way - that thought process is why I started and completed CFP.



Rakesh Bhandari: So CFP Means Certified Financial Planner, Correct. Many MFDs Today Are Just Graduates - Not Chartered Accountants Or MBA Graduates From Finance Fields. Would You Suggest They Take This Course? How Tough Is It? What's The Process? Could You Share Some Information About It?

Sachin Parekh: See, the CFP training isn't very tough for today's generation. In our time, there weren't many videos, and resources were limited. In today's era, you can even complete a Harvard graduation by studying on YouTube. So CFP is not a big deal. But CFP helps you tremendously in building your character, how you talk to clients, how you explain things, and how you help them by putting a scientific process in place. It helps them on their investment journey, and it also builds your confidence when you have a degree.

Rakesh Bhandari: Before CFP And After CFP, Have You Found Any Difference?



To access the full interview, please scan the QR code provided or tune into Nirmal Bang's YouTube channel @NirmalBangGroup.

MUTUAL FUND BLACKBOARD

Large Cap Funds

SCHEME NAME	NAV	Historic Return (%)					AUM (Cr)
		1 Year	3 Years	5 Years	7 Years	10 Years	
Aditya Birla Sun Life Frontline Equity Fund -	548.4	9.2	16.6	16.2	14.5	13.3	31450.9
Baroda BNP Paribas Large Cap Fund - Growth	227.0	4.5	16.8	15.4	15.7	13.2	2781.2
Canara Robeco Bluechip Equity Fund - Growth	65.0	7.3	16.4	14.9	16.0	14.5	17527.0
Kotak Bluechip Fund - Reg - Growth	596.8	8.8	16.7	15.8	15.5	13.5	11080.8
Nippon India Large Cap Fund - Reg - Growth	94.3	8.8	20.5	20.9	16.3	14.9	50312.3
Nifty 100 TRI	36730.4	9.9	15.5	15.5	14.9	14.2	--

Mid Cap Funds

SCHEME NAME	NAV	Historic Return (%)					AUM (Cr)
		1 Year	3 Years	5 Years	7 Years	10 Years	
Edelweiss Mid Cap Fund - Growth	104.8	4.5	27.5	25.6	22.5	18.4	13195.7
Kotak Emerging Equity Fund - Reg - Growth	137.4	2.9	22.7	23.2	20.8	18.0	60479.6
Mahindra Manulife Mid Cap Fund - Reg - Growth	33.7	1.3	25.9	24.1	20.4	--	4260.0
Nippon India Growth Fund - Reg - Growth	4238.3	4.5	26.4	25.2	22.0	18.2	42041.6
Tata Mid Cap Growth Fund - Reg - Growth	451.6	6.5	23.7	21.2	19.4	16.0	5420.0
Nifty Midcap 150 TRI	28429.8	6.7	25.9	24.6	21.0	18.6	--

Small Cap Funds

SCHEME NAME	NAV	Historic Return (%)					AUM (Cr)
		1 Year	3 Years	5 Years	7 Years	10 Years	
Bandhan Small Cap Fund - Reg - Growth	46.7	0.0	31.7	26.3	--	--	18173.9
Edelweiss Small Cap Fund - Reg - Growth	43.9	-2.3	21.6	24.7	--	--	5330.2
HDFC Small Cap Fund - Growth	139.5	0.9	22.9	25.5	18.7	17.7	38020.3
ITI Small Cap Fund - Reg - Growth	28.1	-3.4	27.3	20.6	--	--	2819.1
Tata Small Cap Fund - Reg - Growth	36.9	-11.9	17.5	24.3	20.2	--	11409.7
TRUSTMF Small Cap Fund - Reg - Growth	10.7	0.8	--	--	--	--	1250.5
Nifty Smallcap 250 TRI	21149.4	-5.0	23.6	24.0	19.1	14.9	--

Large & Mid Cap Funds

SCHEME NAME	NAV	Historic Return (%)					AUM (Cr)
		1 Year	3 Years	5 Years	7 Years	10 Years	
Bandhan Core Equity Fund - Reg - Growth	140.1	8.1	24.9	22.5	18.2	16.3	12783.7
DSP Equity Opportunities Fund - Reg - Growth	643.4	7.5	21.8	19.8	17.7	15.8	17215.5
Edelweiss Large & Mid Cap Fund - Growth	90.3	4.4	19.9	19.0	17.5	15.2	4459.7
Kotak Equity Opportunities Fund - Reg - Growth	353.2	6.0	20.3	19.2	18.0	16.0	29961.4
Tata Large & Mid Cap Fund - Reg - Growth	525.1	1.8	14.0	16.3	15.6	13.4	8752.9
UTI Large & Mid Cap Fund - Growth	188.4	7.6	23.6	22.6	17.8	14.9	5498.5
NIFTY Large Midcap 250 TRI	21916.4	8.4	20.8	20.1	18.0	16.5	--

Multicap Funds

SCHEME NAME	NAV	Historic Return (%)					AUM (Cr)
		1 Year	3 Years	5 Years	7 Years	10 Years	
Groww Multicap Fund - Reg - Growth	10.7	7.6	--	--	--	--	286.1
HDFC Multi Cap Fund - Reg - Growth	19.3	3.1	21.8	--	--	--	19910.9
ICICI Prudential Multicap Fund - Growth	803.4	5.1	21.0	20.2	16.4	15.0	16148.2
Mahindra Manulife Multi Cap Fund - Reg - Growth	36.1	3.9	21.7	21.9	19.9	--	6125.1
Nippon India Multi Cap Fund - Reg - Growth	301.4	4.4	23.3	25.7	18.1	15.1	50048.3
NIFTY 500 Multicap 50:25:25 TRI	21536.5	5.4	20.3	20.1	17.7	15.6	--

FlexiCap Funds

SCHEME NAME	NAV	Historic Return (%)					AUM (Cr)
		1 Year	3 Years	5 Years	7 Years	10 Years	
Bajaj Finserv Flexi Cap Fund - Reg - Growth	15.0	7.1	--	--	--	--	6293.7
Helios Flexi Cap Fund - Reg - Growth	15.1	6.3	--	--	--	--	5510.9
Mirae Asset Flexi Cap Fund - Reg - Growth	16.5	8.3	--	--	--	--	3435.7
Parag Parikh Flexi Cap Fund - Reg - Growth	87.2	8.3	22.8	20.2	21.0	17.5	129782.5
WhiteOak Capital Flexi Cap Fund - Reg - Growth	17.9	5.6	20.7	--	--	--	6864.7
BSE 500 TRI	48257.4	7.6	17.5	17.4	16.2	15.0	--

Focused Funds

SCHEME NAME	NAV	Historic Return (%)					AUM (Cr)
		1 Year	3 Years	5 Years	7 Years	10 Years	
HDFC Focused 30 Fund - Growth	238.3	10.9	21.9	24.7	18.2	14.5	26229.6
Nippon India Focused Equity Fund - Reg - Growth	124.8	9.1	16.3	18.3	16.1	13.9	8886.8
BSE 500 TRI	48257.4	7.6	17.5	17.4	16.2	15.0	--

Dividend Yield Funds

SCHEME NAME	NAV	Historic Return (%)					AUM (Cr)
		1 Year	3 Years	5 Years	7 Years	10 Years	
ICICI Prudential Dividend Yield Equity Fund	54.8	11.9	24.2	25.5	19.1	16.4	6358.0
UTI Dividend Yield Fund - Growth	182.4	5.4	21.9	18.8	16.5	14.7	3936.5
Nifty 500 TRI	38138.7	7.7	17.8	17.5	16.2	14.9	--

Contra/Value Funds

SCHEME NAME	NAV	Historic Return (%)					AUM (Cr)
		1 Year	3 Years	5 Years	7 Years	10 Years	
Bandhan Sterling Value Fund - Reg - Growth	153.1	5.0	19.5	23.3	17.3	15.9	10439.7
SBI Contra Fund - Growth	398.2	5.8	21.5	24.7	21.3	16.7	49837.5
BSE 500 TRI	48257.4	7.6	17.5	17.4	16.2	15.0	--

ELSS Funds

SCHEME NAME	NAV	Historic Return (%)					AUM (Cr)
		1 Year	3 Years	5 Years	7 Years	10 Years	
Bajaj Finserv ELSS Tax Saver Fund - Reg - Growth	11.5	--	--	--	--	--	73.1
Bandhan ELSS Tax saver Fund - Reg - Growth	159.4	7.9	17.5	20.1	16.9	15.4	7327.2
Groww ELSS Tax Savings Fund - Reg - Growth	20.1	-1.1	14.3	13.0	11.9	--	53.4
Parag Parikh ELSS Tax Saver Fund - Reg - Growth	32.1	6.1	18.1	18.8	--	--	5866.9
Nifty 500 TRI	38138.7	7.7	17.8	17.5	16.2	14.9	--

Thematic / Sector Funds

SCHEME NAME	NAV	Historic Return (%)					AUM (Cr)
		1 Year	3 Years	5 Years	7 Years	10 Years	
Canara Robeco Consumer Trends Fund - Reg - Growth	111.9	4.7	17.3	17.6	17.2	16.2	2036.4
ICICI Prudential Business Cycle Fund - Reg - Growth	25.7	14.8	23.3	--	--	--	15708.1
Mirae Asset Great Consumer Fund - Growth	95.0	4.9	17.9	18.4	15.9	15.8	4786.6
Nippon India Pharma Fund - Reg - Growth	511.8	-0.4	21.5	15.4	19.5	13.1	8458.7
Tata Digital India Fund - Reg - Growth	50.1	-7.9	17.4	16.8	20.1	--	12084.9
Nifty 500 TRI	38138.7	7.7	17.8	17.5	16.2	14.9	--

Arbitrage Funds

SCHEME NAME	NAV	Historic Return (%)					AUM (Cr)
		3 Months	6 Months	1 Year	2 Years	3 Years	
Bandhan Arbitrage Fund - Reg - Growth	33.3	5.9	5.2	6.1	6.9	7.0	8882.0
Edelweiss Arbitrage Fund - Reg - Growth	19.9	6.2	5.4	6.3	7.0	7.1	16720.0
Invesco India Arbitrage Fund - Growth	32.8	6.4	5.7	6.4	7.0	7.1	27562.0
Kotak Equity Arbitrage Fund - Reg - Growth	38.5	6.2	5.5	6.4	7.1	7.2	72774.0
Tata Arbitrage Fund - Reg - Growth	14.8	6.3	5.6	6.3	6.9	7.0	20154.0
Nifty 50 Arbitrage Index	2602.9	7.8	6.9	7.5	7.6	7.7	--

Equity Savings Funds

SCHEME NAME	NAV	Historic Return (%)					AUM (Cr)
		1 Year	3 Years	5 Years	7 Years	10 Years	
DSP Equity Savings Fund - Reg - Growth	22.3	6.1	10.3	9.7	9.0	--	3936.1
HDFC Equity Savings Fund - Growth	67.8	6.7	10.6	11.0	9.8	9.9	5904.0
Kotak Equity Savings Fund - Reg - Growth	27.2	7.4	11.9	10.7	10.2	9.6	9422.2
NIFTY 50 Hybrid Composite Debt 65:35 Index	21437.3	9.6	12.4	12.1	12.6	12.1	--

Fund Of Funds

SCHEME NAME	NAV	Historic Return (%)					AUM (Cr)
		1 Year	3 Years	5 Years	7 Years	10 Years	
HDFC Asset Allocator Fund Of Funds	19.3	14.1	16.9	--	--	--	5229.2
ICICI Prudential Asset Allocator Fund (FOF)	124.7	10.5	14.2	13.6	12.8	12.6	28974.1
ICICI Prudential Thematic Advantage Fund (FOF)	233.3	10.4	20.1	21.8	19.0	16.3	8102.0
Kotak Income Plus Arbitrage FOF - Reg - Growth	12.7	7.2	7.9	--	--	--	7500.2
Nippon India Asset Allocator FoF - Reg - Growth	22.8	15.1	21.2	--	--	--	1685.1
Nifty 500 TRI	38138.7	7.7	17.8	17.5	16.2	14.9	--

Balanced Advantage Funds

SCHEME NAME	NAV	Historic Return (%)					AUM (Cr)
		1 Year	3 Years	5 Years	7 Years	10 Years	
Edelweiss Balanced Advantage Fund - Growth	52.7	7.1	13.4	12.2	12.8	11.1	13411.4
Mirae Asset Balanced Advantage Fund - Reg	14.5	8.3	13.0	--	--	--	2003.1
Nippon India Balanced Advantage Fund - Reg	181.5	7.2	12.9	12.0	11.2	10.9	9748.8
Tata Balanced Advantage Fund - Reg - Growth	21.1	5.9	11.4	11.3	--	--	9857.1
NIFTY 50 Hybrid Composite Debt 65:35 Index	21437.3	9.6	12.4	12.1	12.6	12.1	--

Hybrid Aggressive Funds

SCHEME NAME	NAV	Historic Return (%)					AUM (Cr)
		1 Year	3 Years	5 Years	7 Years	10 Years	
Baroda BNP Paribas Aggressive Hybrid Fund	28.5	3.9	15.2	14.3	14.5	--	1275.7
Edelweiss Aggressive Hybrid Fund - Growth	65.1	6.3	17.6	16.9	15.2	12.9	3412.8
Kotak Equity Hybrid Fund - Growth	63.8	4.4	15.8	16.1	15.6	13.4	8462.2
UTI Aggressive Hybrid Fund - Growth	420.3	6.5	17.7	17.6	14.5	12.8	6717.9
NIFTY 50 Hybrid Composite Debt 65:35 Index	21437.3	9.6	12.4	12.1	12.6	12.1	--

Multi Asset Allocation Funds

SCHEME NAME	NAV	Historic Return (%)					AUM (Cr)
		1 Year	3 Years	5 Years	7 Years	10 Years	
Nippon India Multi Asset Allocation Fund	23.9	19.3	21.1	17.1	--	--	9600.9
Tata Multi Asset Opportunities Fund - Reg - Growth	25.5	14.4	16.4	15.6	--	--	4616.8
UTI Multi Asset Allocation Fund - Growth	79.7	11.7	21.3	15.5	13.3	11.6	6551.1
WhiteOak Capital Multi Asset Allocation Fund	15.2	17.7	--	--	--	--	5065.2
NIFTY 50 Hybrid Composite Debt 65:35 Index	21437.3	9.6	12.4	12.1	12.6	12.1	--

Gold Funds

SCHEME NAME	NAV	Historic Return (%)					AUM (Cr)
		1 Year	3 Years	5 Years	7 Years	10 Years	
HDFC Gold ETF Fund of Fund - Growth	40.7	76.2	33.7	20.6	21.8	16.8	7632.8
Kotak Gold Fund - Reg - Growth	52.3	75.8	33.6	20.5	21.9	16.9	4810.6
Nippon India Gold Savings Fund - Reg - Growth	52.1	76.1	33.8	20.6	21.7	16.7	4849.3
Prices of Gold	135850.0	79.5	35.9	22.3	23.4	18.4	--

Overnight Funds

SCHEME NAME	NAV	Historic Return (%)					AUM (Cr)
		2 Weeks	1 Month	3 Months	1 Year	YTM	
Kotak Overnight Fund - Reg - Growth	1408.2	5.1	5.1	5.3	5.8	5.5	6725.0
Tata Overnight Fund - Reg - Growth	1391.5	5.1	5.2	5.3	5.8	5.5	3564.0

Liquid Funds

SCHEME NAME	NAV	Historic Return (%)					AUM (Cr)
		2 Weeks	1 Month	3 Months	1 Year	YTM	
ICICI Prudential Liquid Fund - Reg - Growth	397.1	5.4	5.6	5.7	6.5	6.0	47726.0
Mahindra Manulife Liquid Fund - Reg - Growth	1745.9	5.3	5.6	5.8	6.5	6.1	1190.0
Nippon India Liquid Fund - Reg - Growth	6546.6	5.3	5.5	5.7	6.5	6.0	32355.0

Ultra Short Funds

SCHEME NAME	NAV	Historic Return (%)					AUM (Cr)
		3 Months	6 Months	1 Year	3 Years	YTM	
Aditya Birla Sun Life Savings Fund - Reg - Growth	565.2	6.0	6.2	7.4	7.4	23785.3	6.7
Kotak Savings Fund - Reg - Growth	44.1	5.6	5.7	6.8	6.9	16007.8	6.5

Money Market Funds

SCHEME NAME	NAV	Historic Return (%)					AUM (Cr)
		3 Months	6 Months	1 Year	3 Years	YTM	
Aditya Birla Sun Life Money Manager Fund	381.4	5.7	5.9	7.4	7.5	32711.0	6.3
UTI Money Market Fund - Reg - Growth	3180.7	5.9	6.0	7.5	7.5	22197.9	6.2

Low Duration Funds

SCHEME NAME	NAV	Historic Return (%)					AUM (Cr)
		3 Months	6 Months	1 Year	3 Years	YTM	
Bandhan Low Duration Fund - Reg - Growth	39.7	5.4	5.5	7.1	7.1	7046.0	6.4
ICICI Prudential Savings Fund - Reg - Growth	561.3	6.4	6.3	7.7	7.7	30205.8	6.7
UTI Low Duration Fund - Reg - Growth	3657.5	6.0	6.0	7.6	7.4	3184.1	6.7

Short Term Funds

SCHEME NAME	NAV	Historic Return (%)					AUM (Cr)
		3 Months	6 Months	1 Year	3 Years	YTM	
HDFC Short Term Debt Fund - Growth	32.9	5.5	5.2	7.7	7.7	18411.9	6.9
ICICI Prudential Short Term Fund - Growth	62.0	6.0	5.6	7.9	7.7	23701.8	7.1
Nippon India Short Term Fund - Reg - Growth	54.2	4.9	4.8	7.7	7.5	9795.8	7.0

Corporate Bond Funds

SCHEME NAME	NAV	Historic Return (%)					AUM (Cr)
		3 Months	6 Months	1 Year	3 Years	YTM	
Aditya Birla Sun Life Corporate Bond Fund	115.5	4.6	4.2	7.1	7.6	30554.5	7.0
HDFC Corporate Bond Fund - Growth	33.3	4.7	4.2	7.1	7.6	36381.7	7.0

Dynamic Bond Funds

SCHEME NAME	NAV	Historic Return (%)					AUM (Cr)
		3 Months	6 Months	1 Year	3 Years	YTM	
ICICI Prudential All Seasons Bond Fund - Growth	37.7	4.3	3.8	7.0	7.6	14983.3	7.5
Nippon India Dynamic Bond Fund - Reg - Growth	37.9	3.6	1.8	6.6	7.4	4241.5	6.8

Medium Duration Funds

SCHEME NAME	NAV	Historic Return (%)					AUM (Cr)
		3 Months	6 Months	1 Year	3 Years	YTM	
Axis Strategic Bond Fund - Growth	28.8	5.6	5.5	8.0	8.0	1941.1	7.8
ICICI Prudential Medium Term Bond Fund - Growth	46.4	7.1	6.8	8.8	7.9	5796.2	7.7
SBI Magnum Medium Duration Fund - Growth	52.5	5.2	4.9	7.2	7.5	6945.7	7.5

Gilt Funds

SCHEME NAME	NAV	Historic Return (%)					AUM (Cr)
		3 Months	6 Months	1 Year	3 Years	YTM	
Bandhan Government Securities Fund Investment Plan	35.3	2.0	1.4	3.6	6.9	2274.9	6.1
ICICI Prudential Constant Maturity Gilt Fund	25.0	1.7	1.6	7.0	7.9	2582.4	6.8
Kotak Gilt Fund - Growth	94.7	-1.2	-2.2	1.8	5.7	3339.9	7.3
Nippon India Nivesh Lakshya Fund - Reg - Growth	17.8	0.1	-0.8	3.6	7.3	9419.8	7.2

Credit Risk Funds

SCHEME NAME	NAV	Historic Return (%)					AUM (Cr)
		3 Months	6 Months	1 Year	3 Years	YTM	
ICICI Prudential Credit Risk Fund - Growth	33.1	7.9	7.9	9.3	8.3	5936.3	8.1
Nippon India Credit Risk Fund - Reg - Growth	36.2	6.0	6.9	8.8	8.2	1013.3	8.2

Disclaimer : Mutual Fund Investments are subject to market risks. Please read the offer document carefully before investing. Past performance is no guarantee of future performance. Returns are of Growth option of Regular plans. Returns which are below 1 year period are Annualized Returns. Source: - ICRA MFI, NAV as on 23rd December 2025

TECHNICAL OUTLOOK

T

he Nifty index witnessed a consolidative yet constructive phase during December '25, marked by heightened volatility but no decisive trend reversal. After opening the month near record highs, the index faced profit-booking pressure. The first half of the month witnessed a lower high and lower low price structure, forming a short-term consolidation pattern.

The latter half witnessed a reversal while a classical breakout pattern such as a double bottom was conclusively triggered. This price behaviour suggests that the market is currently in a time correction rather than a price correction. Furthermore, RSI hovered around the 50-55 zones, indicating sluggish momentum as it traded near its mean level, reflecting the indecision in the overall market.

Technically, Nifty has good support at 25,700 provided by a downward trend line. As long as it sustains above those levels, the outlook remains positive with potential to test 26,600–27,000 levels in the near term. However, on the flip side, any decisive break

below 25,700 could trigger profit booking towards 25,300.

Overall, December '25 can be characterized as a healthy consolidation phase within an ongoing bull market. Traders should continue to adopt a buy-on-dips approach while keeping a close watch on range boundaries for confirmation of the next directional breakout as the market transitions into 2026.

Bank Nifty witnessed sideways momentum since testing its all-time high formation. A lower high, lower low structure continued, holding its RSI near the mean level of 50. Immediate resistance is placed near 59,800. A breakout above this level may resume upward momentum towards the 60,700/61,500 levels. Support for Bank Nifty is placed at 57,700. A close below this level may lead to a sell-off towards the 57,000-56,200 zone.

In Nifty Options for the January series, the highest Open Interest (OI) build-up is seen near the 26,500 and 27,000 Call strikes, while on the Put side, it is observed at the 26,000 and 25,500 levels.

The trend in most of the December series remained sideways for Nifty within a 400-point range from 25,700-26,100, while most stocks are showing consolidation breakouts as per open interest and price actions, which is a positive

sign and can help markets to provide strong support for momentum to carry ahead.

India VIX, which measures the immediate 30-day volatility in the market, has been trading near its all-time low and has remained in the 11.5-9.5 range and is expected to stay within the 9.5-13.5 range during the January series.

The Put-Call Ratio - Open Interest (PCR-OI) for Nifty Options has been between 0.7 and 1.3 in December and is likely to remain within the 0.8 to 1.40 levels in January.

Markets are expected to witness buying from support, with supports placed at the 26,000 and 25,800 levels. Resistance is likely around 26,300 and 26,500.

OPTIONS STRATEGY Bull Call Spread

A Bull Call Spread strategy can be initiated by buying 1 lot of 20JAN 26100 CE (₹275) and selling 1 lot of 20JAN 27000 CE (₹25). The total outflow of premium comes to around 250 points, which also marks the maximum loss in this strategy. A stop-loss can be set at 120 points (that is, a 130-point loss from the total premium). The maximum gain is limited to 630 points. With the current OI positions showing constant additions in Put strikes and support moving higher in Nifty Options, momentum is expected to continue, making this strategy potentially profitable.

THE ART OF INTELLIGENT INVESTING MISTAKES

Investors win not by being
mistake-free but by turning
every error into a rule, a
system, and an advantage



MISTAKE

LESSON

f there is one truth every investor eventually discovers, it is this: investment mistakes are unavoidable. Yet most investors come to the market with the opposite belief - that successful investing means avoiding errors entirely. The desire to be mistake-free is understandable as no one wants to make mistakes when it comes to their investments.

Retail investors typically operate with limited experience, limited capital buffers, and high expectations. But the reality of the market is completely indifferent to those wishes. Even the most accomplished investors have stories of investment decisions they regret.

Peter Lynch once said, "In this business, if you're good, you're right six times out of ten."

This simple sentence should be printed above every Demat account opening form in the country. It reminds us that mistakes are not anomalies - they are part of the expected distribution of outcomes.

But here is where the real insight lies: Your long-term success doesn't depend on the absence of mistakes. It depends on the quality of the mistakes you make - and how quickly and intelligently you repair them.

The best investors don't optimize for perfection. They optimize for progress. They use mistakes as fuel for decision-making, evidence for improving judgment, and raw material for building personal investing systems.

Intelligent investors don't ask, "How do I avoid mistakes?" They ask, "How do I make mistakes that teach me something valuable without destroying my capital?"

HOW TO MAKE INTELLIGENT MISTAKES

Making Small, Structured Mistakes

Risk in investing often comes from magnitude, not direction. A wrong idea with a small allocation is a lesson. The same wrong idea with a big allocation becomes a life-altering setback for an investor.

American investor and Chairman of Berkshire Hathaway Warren Buffett has often noted, "Risk comes from not knowing what you're doing," but equally, risk comes from betting too big before knowing whether you are right.

Intelligent investors consciously structure their early mistakes. They keep position sizes small when they are testing a new thesis, entering a cyclical at the bottom (or what they believe is the bottom), or exploring a new theme like defence, renewables, AI-linked manufacturing, or specialty chemicals.

These are "training mistakes" - limited in scale, deliberate in intent, and highly informative.

Take the example of a retail investor who notices a steel company reporting excellent numbers. The narrative is positive, and brokers turn bullish.

But instead of betting big, he takes a three percent allocation, treating this as a controlled experiment.

If the thesis is wrong, the tuition fee is manageable. If the thesis is right, conviction will rise and the allocation can be scaled. This discipline transforms potential damage into a calculated learning step.

Starting With Clear Hypotheses

An intelligent mistake is one that can be studied. A vague decision cannot. This is why the best investors document

their thinking. They write down their hypotheses:

"I believe margins will expand because input costs are falling."

"This company will gain market share due to capacity expansion."

"This is a long-term compounder with high ROCE and predictable cash flows."

When the stock moves atypically - either rising for no clear reason or falling sharply - the investor can revisit this hypothesis and identify what went wrong. Was it faulty reasoning? Optimism bias? Bad data? Or a misread of the economic cycle?

American stock trader Jesse Livermore famously said, "The market is never wrong; opinions often are."

Writing down those opinions gives you a blueprint for later understanding how your thinking diverged from reality.

Using Mistakes to Study Yourself

Some of the most important mistakes are not analytical - they are behavioural.

Investors often overestimate their ability to tolerate volatility, hold winners through consolidation, or stay patient during short-term noise.

American businessman, investor and philanthropist Charlie Munger summarized this psychological battle perfectly: "The big money is not in the buying and the

selling, but in the waiting."

Yet, most investors interrupt compounding far too early. One example illustrates this well. A retail investor buys a specialty chemicals company - a proven compounder with strong management and consistent capex.

He/she invests only two percent initially because he/she is testing his/her own discipline. When the stock rises 40% in 12 months, she books profits completely, fearing a reversal. Over the next two years, the stock doubles again.

This mistake has nothing to do with analysis. It was behavioural - an inability to let winners run.

Intelligent investors treat such moments as discoveries. They reveal internal weaknesses: fear of losing paper profits, impatience, anchoring to purchase price, or reliance on past volatility.

Mistakes that reveal personal behavioural bias are invaluable, because they point directly to what needs reform.

HOW TO REPAIR MISTAKES LIKE A PROFESSIONAL

Diagnosing Mistakes, Not Justifying Them

Once a mistake becomes visible, the repair process begins - and it begins with honesty. Investors often suffer from "thesis attachment" - the unwillingness to admit that a decision was wrong.

They defend the stock, add more, blame the market, or

wait indefinitely.

Benjamin Graham warned us long ago: "The investor's worst enemy is likely to be himself." To repair a mistake, one must first diagnose it dispassionately. The key is to ask:

"Is the original reason I bought still intact?"
"Has the business value changed?"

"Is the stock falling due to noise or structural deterioration?"

"Would I buy this stock today if I didn't own it?"

Returning to the metal stock example: two quarters after purchase, commodity prices soften.

The company's margins fall sharply, debt rises, and global demand weakens. The investor reviews his thesis and realizes he bought at the peak of the cycle.

The mistake is now clear - it was a timing error in a cyclical sector.

With clarity comes decisive action: he exits completely. This is not panic. It is clinical repair.

Tools for Repairing Investment Errors

Professionals use structured frameworks to repair mistakes. A few include:

Thesis Verification

Compare the present state of the business against the

original hypothesis.

Zero-Ownership Test

If you didn't own the stock today, would you start a position?

Partial Exit

Reduce exposure when the thesis weakens but hasn't broken fully.

Clean Exit

When fundamentals change irreversibly.

Selective Averaging Down

Rarely used - only when the business is high-quality, debt-light, and mispriced due to temporary sentiment.

In the compounder example, the repair isn't about reversing a loss - it's about correcting behaviour. The investor re-enters the stock gradually, maintaining a disciplined hold-and-review policy. She builds a process to avoid repeating the premature exit mistake.

Ray Dalio distilled this approach best: "Pain plus reflection equals progress." Repairing a mistake is that reflection in action.

HOW TO LEARN RIGOROUSLY FROM MISTAKES

Converting Mistakes Into Rules

The final - and most powerful - step is learning. Learning is not complete until it becomes systematic. The best way to do

this is to convert each mistake into a rule.

From the cyclical stock mistake emerges: "Never buy cyclical stocks when margins are at decade highs. Only enter when industry sentiment is pessimistic and valuations are distressed."

From the compounder mistake: "For high-quality businesses, do not sell solely because the stock has risen. Maintain discipline, not emotion."

Great investors don't accumulate mistakes - they accumulate rules.

Building A Personal "Mistake Library"

Every investor benefits from maintaining a record of decisions. What was assumed? What happened? What changed? What could be done differently? Over time, this record becomes a personalized guidebook - more revealing than any investing course or newsletter.

George Soros captured this mindset beautifully: "It's not whether you're right or wrong; it's how much you make when you're right and how much you lose when you're wrong." A mistake library helps keep losses small and controlled.

Reinforcing Lessons Through Repetition

Learning deepens when patterns are recognized. When reviewing multiple mistakes, themes emerge: buying tips, exiting winners early, holding losers due to hope, or ignoring

cash flow deterioration. Recognizing patterns allows for sharper correction. A quarterly review cycle - looking at winners, losers, avoidable errors, and behavioural slips - turns chaotic investing into structured improvement.

THE EVOLUTION: FROM MISTAKE MAKER TO MISTAKE MANAGER

In the early years, every investor is a mistake maker. Errors are random, emotional, and frequent. With experience, one becomes a mistake reducer - avoiding obvious traps, maintaining discipline, and building process.

Ultimately, the goal is to become a mistake manager: someone who makes only intelligent mistakes, repairs them swiftly, and learns from them relentlessly. Mistakes stop being embarrassments. They become insights, competitive advantages and stepping stones toward mastery.

IN A NUTSHELL

Markets do not reward perfection. They reward clarity. And clarity is often born from mistakes - the right kind of mistakes.

If you can build a personal system around:

1. Making small, structured mistakes;
2. Repairing them methodically;
3. Learning from them rigorously.

You will compound something more powerful than capital: You will compound wisdom.



IMPORTANT JARGON

SECURITIES MARKET CODE: AN OVERHAUL OF LAW PROPOSED FOR MARKETS

Recently, the government introduced the Securities Market Code (SMC) in the Lok Sabha. The government in Union Budget 2021-22 had announced the consolidation of securities law into a single Securities Markets Code.

Q. Why The Need For A New Law?

The existing law for securities markets was passed decades ago. There were multiple overlaps in these legacy laws. Provisions of many of these laws could not keep pace with evolving regulatory practices globally and nationally, development in technology, and sheer growth in scale and complexity of market operations. There were also gaps in enforcement and investor protection. Thus, it was required to review these laws.

Q. What Does the Securities Market Code (SMC) Aim To Do?

The SMC seeks to consolidate, rationalize, and replace a few of the existing laws applicable to the securities market into one code. Broadly, the SMC provides for the expansion of the SEBI Board, strengthens accountability norms, and enhances regulatory powers. It also strengthens investor protection mechanisms and improves grievance redressal systems. The SMC proposes to decriminalize minor offences and simplify compliance.

Q. Which Are The Laws That The SMC Will Replace?

The SMC seeks to replace and consolidate the following Acts into

a single Code: Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) Act, 1992; Depositories Act, 1996; and Securities Contracts (Regulation) Act, 1956. A single coherent law will remove obsolete provisions, overlaps, and inconsistencies. The SMC is divided into 18 chapters.

Q. What Changes Are Proposed For SEBI As A Regulator Per Se?

The Bill proposes to increase the number of SEBI board members from the current 9 to 15. It will comprise a chairperson, two members from the Central government dealing with finance and the administration of the Companies Act, 2013, one officer from the Reserve Bank of India, and 11 other members, of whom at least five will be whole-time members. The Board is proposed to be stronger and more representative. It will also strengthen the

governance and expertise of the regulator.

Q. What Does the Bill Say About Conflicts Of Interest At SEBI?

The bill proposes tighter conflict-of-interest norms for SEBI board members. The SMC proposes mandatory disclosure of direct and indirect interests of board members, including those of family members. SEBI is also empowered to remove board members for any non-compliance.

Q. How Does The Bill Classify Contraventions In The Securities Market?

The SMC proposes a risk-based classification of offenses. Accordingly, punishments would depend on the severity of the offense. Broadly, two categories have been proposed: 1) Fraudulent and unfair trade practices, and 2) Market abuse. The former would include minor offenses like failure to obtain registration, furnishing false statements, failure to maintain records, and certain defaults by service providers. The latter would include activities involving insider trading, defrauding the investors, dealing in securities while possessing non-public information, or using power to manipulate market prices of securities.

Q. What Are the Proposed Penalties For These Offenses?

Currently, contravention of securities law is punishable with imprisonment, fine, or both, in addition to penalty.

The SMC proposes that minor offenses will invite only civil penalties, while major offences would invite civil and/or criminal liability. Such a classification aligns with the government's broader ease of doing business and decriminalization agenda for smaller offenses that do not impact market integrity and public interest.

Q. What Has Been Proposed In Terms Of Time Limitations For Investigations By SEBI?

The SMC proposes time limitations on SEBI inspections. Currently, there is no such limit. It proposes that no inspection will be allowed if eight years have elapsed since the date of contravention. This will ensure legal certainty and closure for market participants. However, these timelines will not apply to major offenses.

Q. What Does The Bill Propose For Investors?

The Bill has certain investor-centric provisions as well. The SMC proposes the incorporation of an Investor Charter. The charter grants certain specified rights, powers, privileges, or functions to individual investors. The Bill specifically empowers SEBI to establish an investor grievance redressal mechanism. It also empowers SEBI to appoint an ombudsperson to redress grievances. An ombudsperson is a neutral and impartial official who investigates complaints against an institution.

Q. What Does The Bill Propose On Coordination

Among Different Regulators?

The Bill provides a framework for inter-regulatory coordination. Accordingly, SEBI in consultation with other regulatory authorities, may make regulations to enable a seamless process for listing of 'other regulated instruments' and to ensure better coordination among Market Infrastructure Institutions (MIIs) in terms of interoperability of any platform. This will improve the investment climate in the country.

Q. What Has The SMC Proposed On Regulated Entities?

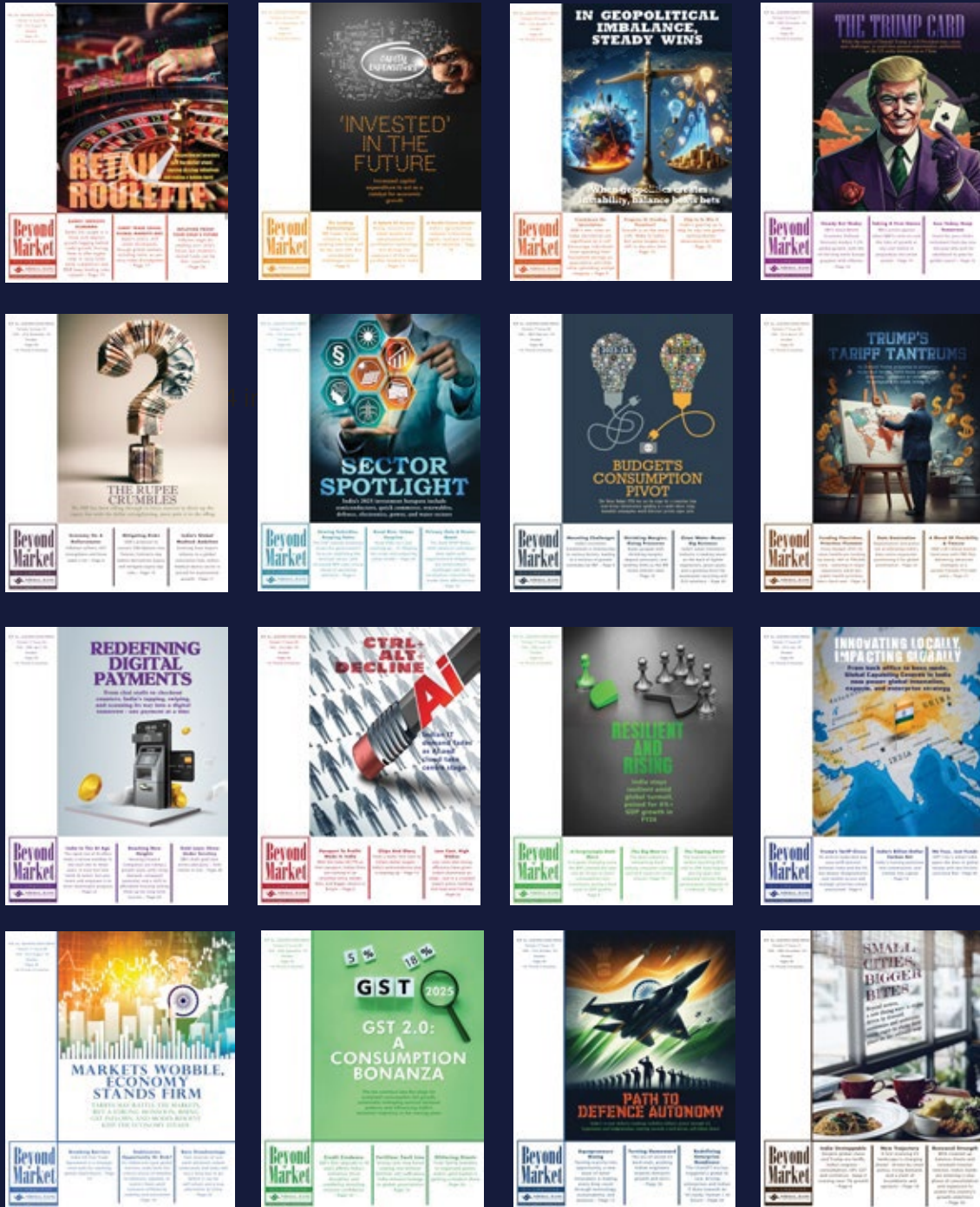
The SMC proposes a consolidated framework for the registration of intermediaries. It also brings stock exchanges, clearing corporations, and depositories under a single code. This will reduce fragmentation and complexity. To aid the ease of doing business, the Bill empowers SEBI to delegate parts of its registration functions to MIIs and self-regulatory organizations (SROs) to facilitate more effective regulation.

Q. What Will Be the Journey Of The Bill Before SMC Becomes Law?

After being introduced in the Lok Sabha, the Bill has been sent to the parliamentary panel on finance for comments and inputs. After accepting or rejecting the inputs, the Bill will have to be passed by both Houses (LS & RS). Thereafter, the President of India's ascent to the Bill will make it the SMC.

International Stock Exchange Holidays For 2026

Date	China	India	Japan	Singapore	U.K	USA	Hong Kong	Taiwan	Korea
01 Jan	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
02 Jan	✓		✓						
03 Jan	✓		✓						
12 Jan			✓						
19 Jan						✓			
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16 Feb	✓					✓		✓	✓
17 Feb	✓			✓			✓	✓	✓
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02 Mar									✓
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20 Mar		✓	✓						
21 Mar		✓		✓					
26 Mar		✓							
31 Mar		✓							
03 Apr				✓	✓	✓		✓	
04 Apr	✓						✓	✓	
05 Apr	✓							✓	
06 Apr	✓				✓			✓	
07 Apr							✓		
14 Apr		✓							
29 Apr			✓						
01 May	✓	✓		✓			✓	✓	✓
02 May	✓								
03 May	✓		✓						
04 May	✓		✓		✓				
05 May	✓		✓						✓
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28 May		✓							
31 May				✓					
19 Jun	✓					✓	✓	✓	
20 Jun	✓								
21 Jun	✓								
26 Jun		✓							
01 Jul									
03 Jul						✓			
09 Aug				✓					
11 Aug			✓						
15 Aug		✓							
17 Aug									✓
31 Aug					✓				
07 Sep						✓			
14 Sep		✓							
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03 Nov			✓						
08 Nov		✓	✓	✓					
10 Nov		✓							
23 Nov			✓						
24 Nov		✓							
26 Nov						✓			
25 Dec		✓		✓	✓	✓		✓	✓
26 Dec					✓		✓		
28 Dec					✓				
31 Dec			✓						✓



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