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## EaseMyTrip Plans to Expand Hotel Inventory to 15 L

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New Delhi: Online travel portal EaseMyTrip, which primarily deals in airline ticket sales, said it is planning to expand its hotel inventory on the platform with plans of taking the number of listed hotels inventory to 15 lakh in India and across the globe from June this year. The company, which competes with other OTAs such as MakeMyTrip and Yatra, said it currently lists 3 lakh hotels on its platform through different partners besides 12,000 directly contracted hotels. This includes hotels and other alternative accommodation options on the platform. Co-founders Nishant and Rishi Pitti said EaseMyTrip is planning to introduce ITC tickets on the platform by the end of April. "Earlier, we used to file our balance sheet as per our top line which means overall ticket sales. From last year, after getting EY as our auditor we are filing our balance sheet and returns as per Ind-AS. Our net revenue is the commission received from airlines," said Nishant Pitti. EaseMyTrip started operations in 2008 as a 100 business where it received deposits from offline travel agents to buy tickets in bulk from different carriers.

## Hunch Ventures Looks to Invest ₹175 cr This Year

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Mumbai: Venture capital fund Hunch Ventures is looking to spend \$25 million (₹175 crore) this year — an investment that includes its latest investment of \$3.3 million (₹25 crore) in Karanja Port, which is managed by Mercantile Ports and Logistics. The fund, that helped the US-based food chain Wendy's and fine-dining chain Jalebi's Italian scale up in India by partnering with the franchising giant own them, wants to now invest more in the logistics space, which includes investing in more warehouses, warehousing complexes as well as food processing units.

Set to open five Wendy's per month from next year from the current rate of opening two sites, Karanja Port, founder of Hunch Ventures said that in the domain of food startups, "It has bitten off more than it can chew."

Going forward, storage, food processing and infrastructure will draw the fund's interest. "We have taken a strategic position in the company (Karanja Port). We want to grow this from west coast to east coast, build more ports and connect in between the warehousing complexes and logistic networks. That's our plan for the business," Singh said. Another pharma startup that it holds 40% stake in — My Healthcare — is set to raise funds via a second round.

## In A Nutshell

### ■ Siddhartha Gupta Appointed Chief Executive of Mercer Metti

**KOLKATA** Siddhartha Gupta, formerly chief revenue officer of Mercer Metti, has been appointed as the company's new CEO. Metti, acquired by Mercer in 2018, is embarking on rapid global expansion while strengthening market leadership in India, reports **Entrepreneur**. With a career spanning over two decades, Gupta has had stints at HP and SAP in India. Gupta grew the company multiple folds in the past three years along with Metti founders Ketan Kapoor and Tommy Shingal. "We're moving from a position of strength and continue to transform Mercer Metti and take it to new heights. Kapoor and Shingal will focus on expanding our offerings across our international region to help companies in India and other growth markets make better evidence-based people decisions," said Mustafa Faizani, CEO, UAE and IMETA.

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# 'Nirav Kept Moving Houses in UK to Evade Punitive Action'

Modi travelled outside UK despite his passport being revoked last Feb, say Indian agencies

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New Delhi: Jeweller Nirav Modi, accused of involvement in the Punjab National Bank fraud, frequently changed his address in the UK to evade punitive action — at least three in a short span of time, said people with knowledge

of the matter.

"Nirav Modi was constantly shifting his base. From central UK he moved to Manchester recently before moving into a flat in London. Our agencies were keeping tabs on him," said a senior government functionary requesting anonymity.

The UK home office told the Indian authorities on March 8 that India's request to extradite Modi had been certified. The move will now be considered by the Westminster Magistrates' Court.

The Indian agencies told the British authorities that Modi had travelled outside the UK on three occasions despite his passport having been revoked in February

last year. This was despite repeated reminders sent to the British. "It is a matter of serious concern and probe that he (Modi) managed to travel three outside the UK. Days of his travel were shared with the British authorities seeking immediate attention," said the person close to the Indian agencies who are awaiting Modi's formal arrest.

"It has been observed that normally London courts do not overturn the sanction authorised by the home secretary. As per procedure, a formal arrest should be issued, following which Nirav Modi will be formally taken into custody and released on bail by another official. "After the court



sets the ball rolling, the extradition proceedings will be initiated and we (Indian agencies) will present their evidence seeking Modi's extradition.

In a related development, the Enforcement Directorate (ED) filed an supplementary chargesheet against Modi and others involved in the Punjab National Bank fraud last week before a special Prevention of Money Laundering Act court in Mumbai.

This details the method used in the \$2-billion scam. It has also charged Modi's wife Ami Modi with laundering millions of dollars through her bank account to purchase an apartment in London.

Modi was spotted in London's West End last week by Britain's Telegraph newspaper, which reported that he's running a new deal in the city.

India is also pursuing extradition proceedings against Modi's uncle and co-accused Mehul Choksi, currently in Antigua. According to the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) and the ED, Modi, Choksi, and companies owned by them obtained more than ₹10,000 crore from PNB through fraudulent letters of undertaking and letters of credit between 2011 and 2017. It was alleged that Modi and others committed the offence in connivance with bank officials.

## Lenders Misled Us on RCom Asset Sale Plan, says NCLAT

Says banks, especially SBI, presented a 'golden outlook' on plan, but no sale took place

Devina Sengupta & Maulik Vyas

Mumbai: An appellate tribunal slammed the lenders of Reliance Communications (RCom), especially the State Bank of India, for painting a rosy picture of the Anil Ambani-owned telco's asset sale plan, which had turned out to be false, and questioned why action shouldn't be taken against the joint lenders group.

The two-member bench of the National Company Law Appellate Tribunal (NCLAT), headed by Justice SJ Mukhopadhyaya, on Monday said, "You have failed. JLF (Joint Lenders' Forum) has failed. No sale took place."

Further, the bench asked as to why "proceedings against them (lenders) should not be initiated" for misleading the tribunal by giving a "golden outlook" to recover around ₹37,000 crore from sale of assets — but no such sale

**Tough Talk**  
JLF has failed and that no sale took place  
Lenders misled tribunal by giving a 'golden outlook' to recover ₹37,000 cr from asset sale



has taken place. "You clapped with RCom and claimed that you would recover around ₹37,000 crore from sale of assets to Reliance Jio...," said the bench.

The bench reacted sharply to SBI's refusal to release income tax refund received by RCom to clear the ₹453 crore that the Anil Ambani-owned operator needs to pay Swedish telecom gearmaker Ericsson.

by March 19, SBI said it can "release the funds till it gets clearance from all lenders."

"Why not give effect to the orders of the Supreme Court? Sending someone (Anil Ambani) to jail will not solve the problem before us," the bench observed. The Supreme Court on February 20 held RCom chairman Anil Ambani in contempt for not paying Ericsson its dues worth ₹71 crore, including interest, despite

having the money to do so and directed the telco and its units to pay the operational creditor the money in four weeks.

Failing this, Ambani would go to jail for three months. RCom has already deposited ₹18 crore in the apex court. Arguing for RCom in the NCLAT on Monday, senior counsel Kapil Sibal said that the telco needs to pay Ericsson its dues by March 19 and the income tax refunds of around ₹20 crore held by SBI should be deposited to the Swedish company directly. Sibal was assisted by lawyer Mahesh Agarwal.

But SBI refused to do so, prompting the bench to say that after failing to get money from sale of assets, the lenders are now trying to recover ₹20 crore from the refunds. NCLAT will next hear the matter on March 12. SBI is the lead banker in a consortium of 37 banks and financial institutions which are seeking to recover their dues from RCom.

## StanChart to Contest NCLT's Essar Steel Award

Saikat Das & Rakhi Mazumdar

Mumbai | Kolkata: Standard Chartered Bank, the third-largest secured financial creditor of Essar Steel, has decided to file an appeal before the National Company Law Appellate Tribunal (NCLAT) against the Ahmedabad bankruptcy court order that last week awarded the asset

to ArcelorMittal at the end of a marathon insolvency proceedings.

The bank's appeal, of which ET has seen a copy, seeks the quashing of last Friday's order at the National Company Law Tribunal (NCLT) that had approved the ₹12,000-crore resolution plan by ArcelorMittal. The bank has also sought rejection of the plan.

Standard Chartered Bank declined to comment on the matter.

Standard Chartered said the implementation of the ArcelorMittal resolution plan would lead to a drastic reduction in its dues — at ₹50 crore from ₹3,487 crore.

Separately, Prashant Rula, part of the Essar Steel promoter family and a director on the company's suspended board, has decided to file an appeal at the NCLAT against the order. The appeal seeks a stay on the resolution

plan.

Rula has not filed a formal appeal since a written copy of the NCLT Ahmedabad bench order of March 8 is yet to be obtained. But the intention to appeal was mentioned before a two-member bench, headed by chairman Justice SJ Mukhopadhyaya. The bench asked it to be listed after the Ahmedabad NCLT posts its full written order.

## CBI to Seek Details on Winsome 'Buyers'

To move special court to issue LR; claims buyers were fronts created by Jatin Mehta

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Mumbai: India's top probe agency plans to seek assistance from the United Arab Emirates and Belgium as part of its broader goal to establish that Jatin Mehta, the fugitive promoter of Winsome Diamonds, had created proxy buyers overseas to divert funds.

"The Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) could approach a special court for issuing the so-called Letters Rogatory (LRs) to seek details of the 15 'buyers' whom Mehta allegedly sold processed gold. The agency wants to establish that Mehta and his co-accused, Jordanian national Hanyam Salman Abu Ali Obaidah, had created these fictitious sets of buyers to move money."

"We are seeking details on the companies, their directors, their books of accounts and their transactions, specifically with Winsome Diamonds and other shell companies floated by Mehta and his associates, to route the funds through layering," said an official. LRs are a formal request mechanism from a court to a foreign court for judicial assistance. The details provided under LRs hold evidential value in court of law.

"Mehta claims that he defaulted on payments as the export proceeds were not received from these foreign buyers, which resulted in the standby letters of credit

(SBLs) being invoked by the bullion banks that caused wrongful loss of ₹16.32 crore to Canara Bank. However, our probe has revealed that these foreign buyers were fronts created by Mehta and his associate Obaidah to divert funds," said the official.

To date, the CBI has registered 11 criminal cases relating to Mehta's Winsome group. The agency said it plans a consolidated LR for each such case to speed up the process. "All the 11 cases are similar and, therefore, there is no point sending multiple LRs in individual cases. Single, comprehensive LRs seeking details on buyers will be sent. Permission will also be sought from the court to use them as evidence in the cases," added the official.

Last June, CBI had filed a charge-sheet against 21 people, including Mehta, his wife Sonia, two Canara Bank top executives, and 15 public officials. This is the first time central agency is seeking overseas assistance after filing the charge-sheet.

"This evidence is very crucial as the details will help ascertain our claims that contrary to the claims made by Mehta that he is being cheated by these buyers, they were nothing but entities floated by him to route back the proceeds of crime," added the official.

The CBI chargesheet says Winsome Diamonds had purchased gold from three bullion banks abroad — The Bank of Nova Scotia, Standard Bank and Standard Chartered Bank — on the basis of guarantees provided by Canara Bank.

Agency keen to establish that Mehta and his co-accused had created these fictitious sets of buyers to move money

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