

Reliance Infrastructure approves proposal seeking to raise Rs 3,014 crore through preferential issue



Mumbai: The board of directors of Reliance Infrastructure on Thursday approved a proposal seeking to raise ₹3,014 crore through a preferential issue.

The board also gave the green signal to seek an enabling resolution from shareholders to raise funds of up to ₹3,000 crore through a qualified institutional placement.

The company will do a preferential issue of up to 12.56 crore equity shares or warrants convertible into equivalent number of equity shares at a price of ₹240 per share or warrant arrived at in accordance with the Sebi ICDR Regulations.

Reliance Infrastructure said the preferential issue will be made to Risee Infinity, a promoter group company, and to other investors, including Florintree Innovation LLP and Fortune Financial & Equities Services Pvt Ltd.

The preferential issue will lead to an increase in the promoters equity stake which now stands at 16.50 per cent.

The preferential issue proceeds would be used for expansion of business operations directly or through investment in subsidiaries and joint ventures, including meeting the long-term working capital requirements and for general corporate purposes. It is expected to enhance the company's net-worth from over ₹9,000 crore to above ₹12,000 crore.

India's mobile phone manufacturing rises to Rs 4.1 lakh crore in value: Report

New Delhi: India's mobile phone manufacturing in value has risen to Rs 4.1 lakh crore in the last 10 years due to strategic government policy measures like product-linked initiative (PLI) and phased-manufacturing programme (PMP) schemes, a report showed on Wednesday.

The electronics sector experienced rapid growth and local production nearly doubled from \$48 billion in FY17 to \$101 billion in FY23 and is around \$115 billion in the current fiscal to date -- driven primarily by mobile phones which now constitute more than 43 per cent of

total electronics production.

As the country becomes the second largest mobile manufacturer in the world, global manufacturing companies like Samsung, Apple and Google are making their latest generation smartphones in India. The report by Broadband India Forum (BIF), prepared by BIF's Koan Advisory, analysed the journey through an empirical study that investigates issues such as the impact of tariff and customs rates, India's global value chains (GVC) insertion, challenges related to the ease of doing business (EoDB), women workforce participation



opportunities and ways of reducing the gender gap and increasing the gender diversity.

TV Ramachandran, President, BIF said that the 'Make in India' initiative has been instrumental in transforming the country into a global hub for

mobile device manufacturing. "Through strategic policies and production linked incentives, the government has attracted major global players and encouraged domestic manufacturers to set up and enhance production facilities

within India," he added.

As a result, the country has witnessed a significant surge in mobile phone production, reducing gradual dependence on imports and creating thousands of jobs in the manufacturing sector. According to S Krishnan, Secretary, MeitY, the country has emerged as the world's secondlargest manufacturer of mobile phones. "The government's priority has always been to enable PLI beneficiaries to maximise their benefits, meet targets, and ultimately enhance India's business environment," Krishnan noted.

Axis Capital barred from new debt issues by Securities and Exchange Board of India

Mumbai: Markets regulator Sebi on Thursday restrained Axis Capital from taking up new assignments as a merchant banker for debt securities until further notice — in a case of providing guarantees for the redemption of non-convertible debentures (NCDs) of Sojo Infotel.

In its interim order, Sebi said: "ACL provided guarantee/indemnity towards redemption of NCDs in the guise of underwriting, which it was not permitted to do under the existing regulatory framework.

"Such activity poses risk to the financial system as it can potentially disrupt the orderly functioning of the market."

After an inspection by the regulator, it was found that Axis Capital had provided guarantees for the redemption of NCDs of Sojo Infotel Pvt. Ltd, which is not permitted for merchant bankers.

This guarantee, which should



have been limited to underwriting the issue at the time of subscription, was seen as a form of credit risk rather than market risk, an activity more suited for banks.

The Credit Rating Agencies (CRAs) rated these NCDs based on Axis Capital's guarantees, which investors relied on. This raised concerns as Axis Capital Ltd (ACL) was acting more like a bank, taking on credit risk.

As Axis Capital continued to support these NCDs, it earned fees over time instead of receiving a one-time payment, which violated the rules for merchant bankers.

Sebi grants permission for mutual funds to both buy and sell Credit Default Swaps

Mumbai: The Securities and Exchange Board of India (Sebi) on Friday allowed mutual funds to both buy and sell Credit Default Swaps (CDS), in a move that will increase liquidity in the corporate bond market.

Credit Default Swaps are like insurance contracts that protect its buyer against potential default by a borrower or a bond issuer. It is a product where the purchaser makes payments to the counterparty (which takes the risk) till the maturity of the contract.

In this arrangement, the risk of default falls upon the seller of the swap who will have to reimburse if any default happens. They hogged the spotlight during the 2008 financial crisis when some of the large banks that had issued these instruments faced bankruptcy due to huge payouts as mortgage defaults surged.

Sebi said in a circular that this flexibility to participate in CDS would serve as an additional investment product for mutual funds. Earlier, fund houses were only permitted to use CDS transactions to buy protection against the credit risk of corporate bonds they held. In other words they could only act as buyers. Further these transactions were limited to Fixed Maturity Plan (FMP) schemes with a duration of more than one year. "It has been decided to allow greater flexibility



to mutual funds to both buy and sell CDS with adequate risk management," Sebi said.

Under the new framework, Sebi said that mutual funds can buy CDS to hedge the credit risk of debt securities they hold. However, the CDS exposure can't exceed the value of the debt security being protected. The regulator added that mutual funds can only buy CDS from sellers with an investment-grade rating or higher. On CDS sellers, the regulator said that mutual funds can sell CDS as part of debt investments backed by cash, government securities or treasury bills. However, overnight and liquid mutual fund schemes cannot sell CDS. The total CDS exposure for a scheme — both buying and selling — cannot exceed 10 per cent of the scheme's assets, Sebi added.

Centre's 'Vivad se Vishwas' scheme 2.0 to start on October 1 in bid to resolve tax disputes

Mumbai: The government has launched the "Vivad Se Vishwas" scheme 2.0, which will come into effect on October 1, according to a government notification.

The scheme is expected to resolve tax disputes, aiming to reduce litigation and boost revenue. The scheme is open to taxpayers with pending income tax disputes before various courts and tribu-

nals, including the Supreme Court, high courts, Income Tax Appellate Tribunal and Commissioner/Joint Commissioner (Appeals). It also covers cases pending before the Dispute Resolution Panel (DRP) and revision petitions before the Commissioner of Income Tax.

The government expects the scheme to help resolve around 2.7 crore direct tax demands worth approximately ₹35

lakh crore. Finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman said in her budget speech that the government is committed to simplifying taxes, improving taxpayer services and reducing litigation. Tax experts say the scheme presents an opportunity for companies to settle disputes and avoid further legal costs. However, they advise businesses to carefully evaluate the scheme's terms and conditions



before making a decision.

Karishma R. Phatarphekar, partner,

Deloitte India, said: "With tax payment rates set to increase by 10 per cent starting January 1, 2025, it is crucial for companies to evaluate their pending income tax litigations from both a cost-benefit standpoint and a broader non-tax perspective. Given the limited time window, an informed decision on opting for the scheme should be made promptly."

MSDE launches special campaign 4.0 to enhance Swachhata and administrative efficiency

Guwahati: The Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship (MSDE) is spearheading the Special Campaign 4.0 from October 2 to October 31, 2024, aimed at reinforcing Swachhata and reducing bureaucratic delays. This initiative, announced by the Government of India, emphasizes both field and outstation offices, alongside various Ministries and Departments,

under the oversight of the Department of Administrative Reforms and Public Grievances (DARPG).

The campaign will focus on institutionalizing cleanliness, finalizing campaign sites, and improving record management. MSDE has been proactive in prior campaigns, addressing 2,305 public grievances and conducting approximately 2,000 cleanliness drives. This

campaign will unfold in two phases: a preparatory phase from September 16 to 30, 2024, and an implementation phase starting October 2.

In Guwahati, the campaign's emphasis on enhancing administrative processes is expected to streamline local government operations and improve public services, reflecting positively in the regional market's operational efficiency.

Kaushal Mahotsav in Bijnor offers 20,000 jobs across industries

Guwahati: The Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship (MSDE) is set to host the Kaushal Mahotsav on September 24, bringing over 50 companies from various sectors, including electronics, automotive, IT, hospitality, and food processing, to participate in a mega recruitment drive. With 13,000 candidates already registered, the event is poised to offer over 20,000 job opportunities.

Organized in collaboration with the National Skill Development Corporation

(NSDC), the Mahotsav aims to bridge the gap between skilled local youth and industry employers. Companies from nearby areas, including Noida, Haridwar, and Gurgaon, will be present, with offer letters to be handed out to successful candidates.

The Mahotsav's focus on regions like Guwahati shows its broad scope, as similar initiatives in the city have boosted the local job market, particularly in the financial services and IT sectors. With growing industrial connections, Guwahati's role as



a recruitment hub continues to rise, offering inspiration for other regions.

Operation Sadbhavana: India extends lifeline to Typhoon-Yagi hit nations

Guwahati: India has launched 'Operation Sadbhavana,' a humanitarian initiative aimed at aiding countries devastated by Typhoon Yagi. Announced by External Affairs Minister Dr. S. Jaishankar on social media, the operation underscores India's commitment to providing relief to Myanmar, Vietnam, and Laos.

The Indian Navy's INS Satpura has already dispatched 10 tons of essential supplies, including dry rations, clothing, and medicines, to Myanmar. Concurrently, the Indian Air Force is airlifting 35 tons of aid to Vietnam, which includes water purification systems, water containers, blankets, kitchen utensils, and solar lanterns. Laos is also receiving 10 tons of relief materials, comprising generators, water purification systems, sanitation supplies, mosquito nets, blankets, and sleeping bags.

The Indian Embassy in Laos reported that an Indian Air Force aircraft delivered the aid, which was formally handed over by Indian Ambassador Prashant Agrawal to the Deputy Minister of Labour and Social Welfare of Laos.

Jayant Chaudhary launches skill development programs in Ranchi to boost local economy



Guwahati: In a strategic move to enhance economic opportunities, the National Skill Development Corporation (NSDC), guided by the Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship, has launched a range of skill development initiatives in Ranchi. The programs, introduced by Shri

Jayant Chaudhary, Minister of State (I/C), Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship, and Shri Sanjay Seth, Minister of State, Ministry of Defence, focus on upskilling women in millet food processing, bamboo handicraft training for tribal women, and recognition of prior learning (RPL) for female masons. The new Kaushal Rath mobile training unit will further extend these opportunities with practical, hands-on education.

In the Guwahati market, these initiatives highlight a growing trend towards integrating traditional skills with modern business practices. Entrepreneurs and artisans in Guwahati are expected to benefit from the enhanced skill sets and entrepreneurial approaches being developed, which could bolster local markets and stimulate economic growth in the region.

Tata STRIVE and Airbus India extend partnership to enhance skill development

Guwahati: Tata STRIVE, the skill development initiative of Tata Community Initiatives Trust (TCIT) and Airbus India Private Limited have extended their partnership in the areas of skill development and livelihood generation. As part of this joint initiative, a skill training centre called Airbus-Tata STRIVE Skills Training Centres are being established. The partnership aims to provide a platform to the students who want to make their careers in digital courses gaining valuable exposure in the training infrastructure that has been established at the centre.

Shri Jayant Chaudhary, Hon'ble Minister of State (I/C), Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship mentioned, "I am delighted to launch the two skilling centers in Delhi and Ban-

galore in partnership with Tata Strive and Airbus, marking a significant step in equipping our youth with future-ready skills. During my visit to the center, it was inspiring to meet the bright and ambitious candidates who represent India's next generation of innovators."

The youth from Delhi NCR and Karnataka will be the biggest gainer from the institutes. The institutes with its state-of-the-art facilities and future expansion plans will meet the demands to a greater extent. The success of the institute would also lead to the development of a large skilled workforce, which would further encourage the industrial community to establish their presence in the region, mitigating the challenge of unemployment.

Honda India Foundation launches "Project Buniyaad" to empower youth in Mizoram



Aizawl: The Honda India Foundation (HIF) has unveiled "Project Buniyaad - Aathmanirbharta Ka Aadhar" in Aizawl, Mizoram, marking a significant advancement in skill development and employment for marginalized youth. Launched in collaboration with the Mizoram Youth Commission (MYC) and Visan Foundation, the initiative aims to offer 100% job placements in the hospitality sector to youth from North-Eastern states and Jammu and Kashmir.

Inaugurated by Mizoram Chief Minister Shri Pu Lalduhoma, the project combines resources from HIF for funding, the State Government for infrastructure, Visan

Foundation for training, and hotels and hospitals for job placements. Since its February 2024 debut, "Project Buniyaad" has successfully trained over 500 individuals nationally, enhancing their employability.

In Mizoram, this initiative addresses a critical need for skilled professionals in the hospitality sector. The program's expansion to the region is expected to boost local employment, foster economic growth, and enhance the quality of service in the state's burgeoning tourism industry. The project's focus on training and placement aligns with Mizoram's economic goals and provides new career opportunities for its youth.

Toyota Kirloskar Motor announces special-purpose Hilux at Himtech 2024



Shillong: Toyota Kirloskar Motor (TKM) showcased its specially modified Hilux at the Himtech 2024 symposium, an initiative of the Indian Army and FICCI aimed at advancing self-reliance in defense. The event, held at the Rinchen Auditorium Grounds in Leh, highlighted military technology for high-altitude operations and attracted senior officials from various defense sectors.

The Hilux, celebrated for its quality, durability, and reliability, was presented in two variants: the Field Deployment Vehicle (FDV) and a modified version tailored

for rugged terrains. The FDV, having passed rigorous trials with the Northern Army Command, is designed for logistics and diagnostics in remote areas. Meanwhile, the modified Hilux features enhanced off-road capabilities, crucial for military operations.

In Shillong, the Hilux is gaining traction among businesses needing robust vehicles for challenging conditions, reflecting a growing demand for versatile utility vehicles in northeastern India. TKM's commitment to innovation and customization positions it as a key player in meeting diverse mobility needs.

SBI General partners with Maruti Suzuki to boost insurance awareness in Ri-Bhoi and Shillong

Guwahati/Shillong: SBI General Insurance, in collaboration with Maruti Suzuki Insurance Broking, organized an insurance awareness camp in Nongpo, Ri-Bhoi district, Meghalaya. This initiative aimed to educate the local community about the importance of insurance in ensuring financial security during emergencies. The camp featured free vehicle and eye check-ups, attracting enthusiastic participation from the Nongpo community. The initiative comes on the heels of a previous session held at St. Mary's Higher Secondary



School, Shillong. These efforts are part of a larger mission to enhance financial literacy and safety awareness across the state.

An SBI General spokesperson stated, "As the leading insurer in Meghalaya, we are dedicated to increasing insurance awareness. Our partnership with Maruti Suzuki Insurance Broking

allows us to empower the community with crucial knowledge about insurance, helping them make informed decisions."

With 95% of India's population still uninsured, SBI General aims to increase insurance penetration through upcoming collaborations with government institutions and NGOs.

India shines at WorldSkills 2024; Minister Jayant Chaudhary inspires Team India

Guwahati: In a boost for India's WorldSkills 2024 contingent, Minister of State (I/C) for Skill Development and Entrepreneurship, Shri Jayant Chaudhary, visited the competition in Lyon, France. Over two days, Chaudhary, alongside Secretary MSDE Shri Atul Kumar Tiwari, met with the 60-member team competing in 52 skill categories, including robotics, web development, and culinary arts. His visit highlighted India's dedication to global skills development and showcased its burgeoning talent.

Chaudhary engaged directly with competitors, observing their work and expressing

pride in their achievements. "Our competitors' dedication and enthusiasm are truly impressive," he remarked, reinforcing India's commitment to becoming a global leader in skills and vocational training.

In Guwahati, local stakeholders are closely watching the competition. The city, known for its vibrant educational and skill development sectors, is keenly interested in the outcomes, which could inspire and influence local youth and skill programs. The success of Team India at WorldSkills could lead to greater investment in skill development initiatives in Guwahati and beyond.

HP launches new Color LaserJet Pro Printers for Indian businesses

Guwahati: HP announces its new Color LaserJet Pro 3000 series, designed for small and medium businesses in India. The series, featuring TerraJet toner technology, offers enhanced print speed, vivid colors, and energy efficiency. The two models—HP Color LaserJet Pro 3203dw and 3303sdw—provide up to 25 pages per minute, with quick first print times and duplex printing as standard.

The HP Color LaserJet Pro 3303sdw includes multifunction capabilities, Wi-Fi connectivity, and HP Wolf Pro Security, ensuring top-notch security and convenience. HP's emphasis on sustainability is highlighted with its low-energy usage and TerraJet technology.

In Guwahati, this printer series is expected to gain traction among businesses seeking efficient printing solutions. Guwahati, being a commercial hub, can benefit from the printers' ability to handle high-volume workloads while cutting down on operational costs.

With prices starting at INR 50,304, the new printers are available on the HP eStore and through authorized partners across India.

Launching ICICI Pru Signature Pension

Shillong: ICICI Prudential Life Insurance has launched 'ICICI Pru Signature Pension', a market linked pension product enabling customers to build a cost and tax efficient retirement fund. Retirement planning is a crucial activity and a must for all customers to be financially independent. This unique product helps customers to effectively plan for both the accumulation and income generation phases of retirement planning. Market linked retirement savings plan with the option of upto 100% equity exposure. Tax-free withdrawal of up to 60% of the fund value. Flexibility to make partial withdrawals to meet unexpected financial needs. Waiver of premium add-on benefit ensures continuity of the retirement plan. Two new funds offered – Pension India Growth and Pension Balanced Funds.

Mr. Amit Palta, Chief Distribution Officer, ICICI Prudential Life Insurance said, "We are happy to offer ICICI Pru Signature Pension, a market linked product which provides customers the opportunity to participate in the India growth story to build their retirement corpus. This product allows customers to have a 100% exposure to equity besides offering unlimited free switches between equity, debt and balanced funds to maximise returns."

He concluded, "Our claim settlement ratio of 99.17% in FY2024 for individual death claims, with an average settlement turnaround time of just 1.27 days (non-investigated death claims) is one of the best in the industry."

Royal Enfield announces exclusive women's wear collection

Shillong: Royal Enfield has launched its new women's wear collection, celebrating the growing community of female riders with a blend of style, comfort, and protection. This exclusive range features all-weather riding jackets, helmets, and lifestyle apparel designed to empower women on the road. Notably, the collection includes the Streetwind Eco Riding Jacket, crafted from 75 recycled PET bottles, marking a significant step towards

sustainability.

The collection offers a variety of products, including the Tourer Women's Riding Jacket with CE Level 2 protection and the Ride More Leggings with high-abrasion Poly Lycra and CE certified protectors. The lifestyle line encompasses stylish bomber jackets, denim, and leather options, all made from premium fabrics to suit diverse riding moods.

Shillong's response to Royal Enfield's

new collection is robust. The city's growing interest in motorcycling and adventure sports is reflected in the enthusiastic reception of this collection, which aligns with local trends towards high-quality, fashionable riding gear.

Yadvinder Singh Guleria, Chief Commercial Officer at Royal Enfield, emphasized that the collection aims to inspire women to embrace motorcycling with confidence and self-expression.

BLS E-Services and Aditya Birla Health Insurance collaborate to boost access to health insurance in Assam

Guwahati: BLS E-Services has teamed up with Aditya Birla Health Insurance (ABHICL) to provide essential health insurance products across Assam. The strategic partnership will offer the Group Hospital Cash and Group Personal Accident policies, expanding access to crucial financial protection. The Group Hospital Cash plan offers ₹1,000 per day for hospital stays and doubles to ₹2,000 for ICU admissions, covering up to four family members.

This collaboration is set to benefit Assam's

growing market, including cities like Guwahati, where access to affordable health insurance is vital. With Guwahati's healthcare system expanding, such plans offer a financial safety net, allowing families to focus on recovery without the stress of medical expenses.

Shikhar Aggarwal, Chairman of BLS E-Services, highlighted the goal of bringing essential services closer to citizens. The Personal Accident Insurance will provide coverage starting at ₹2 lakh, offering financial protection in case of accidental death or disability.

LIC Mutual Fund launches LIC MF manufacturing fund to tap growth potential

Guwahati: LIC Mutual Fund has announced the launch of its LIC MF Manufacturing Fund, an open-ended equity scheme focused on the manufacturing sector. The New Fund Offer (NFO) is now open for subscription from September 20 to October 4, 2024, with units allotted on October 11, 2024. Managed by Mr. Yogesh Patil and Mr. Mahesh Bendre, the scheme aims to achieve long-term capital appreciation by investing in equity instruments related to various manufacturing industries, including automobiles, pharmaceuticals, and metals.

Mr. R K Jha, Managing Director & CEO of LIC Mutual Fund, highlighted that India's GDP growth, urbanization, and government initiatives like 'Make in India' are creating a favorable environment for the manufacturing sector, positioning India as a global manufacturing hub.

In Guwahati, local investors are expected to benefit from this initiative, aligning with the region's growing emphasis on manufacturing and economic development, fostering opportunities for portfolio diversification in a rising market.

Sanofi Consumer Healthcare India sets the stage with BSE and NSE listings

Mumbai: Sanofi Consumer Healthcare India Limited (SCHIL) has made a significant stride by listing its shares on the Bombay Stock Exchange (BSE) and the National Stock Exchange (NSE). The event, marked by the ringing of the opening bell at BSE by Himanshu Bakshi, SCHIL's Managing Director, symbolizes a new chapter for the company. This milestone follows SCHIL's separation from Sanofi India Limited, effective June 1, 2024, as part of a Scheme of Arrangement approved by the National Company Law Tribunal.

Bakshi emphasized the potential within India's consumer healthcare market, noting, "Our listing is a transformative step that will drive growth and foster innovation in our sector. We are dedicated to enhancing consumer experiences and addressing emerging health-



care needs through advanced digital solutions."

In Shillong, SCHIL's market entry is anticipated to create a buzz, as the company's focus on quality consumer healthcare products aligns with the region's increasing demand for reliable and innovative health solutions.

Mohun Bagan Held to Goalless Draw in ACL-II Opener

Kolkata: Mohun Bagan began their AFC Champions League Two campaign with a frustrating goalless draw against Tajikistan's FC Ravshan at the Salt Lake Stadium on Wednesday. Despite dominating possession and creating numerous opportunities, the ISL Shield champions failed to capitalize in front of 18,908 home fans

Frustrations grew as fans chanted "Go Back Molina," expressing dissatisfaction with head coach Antonio López Habas's recent leadership following a series of poor performances, including the team's collapse in the Durand Cup final against NorthEast United FC. This latest result only added to the pressure on Molina.

Mohun Bagan started strongly, controlling possession and forcing FC Ravshan into a defensive stance. However, they struggled to convert their dominance into tangible opportunities. Dimitri Petratos had the best chance of the first half, weaving past defenders but seeing his effort blocked

by Ravshan's defense in the 19th minute. The Mariners' defense had a scare in the 28th minute when Kojo Matic's clever ball set up Muhammadjon Rahimov, but goalkeeper Vishal Kaith pulled off a crucial save to keep the game level. Ravshan had more chances, including a missed free kick following a foul by Dipendu Biswas.

Despite continued pressure, Mohun Bagan failed to register a shot on target in the first half. Their best chance came in the 76th minute when Australian forward Jason Cummings found himself one-on-one with Ravshan's goalkeeper Yevhen Hrytsenko, only to squander the opportunity with a weak shot aimed straight at the keeper. In the dying moments, Dimitri Petratos slotted the ball into the net in the 88th minute, but the goal was ruled offside, much to the dismay of the home crowd. Another chance came in the 90th minute when Petratos was brought down in the box, but penalty appeals were waved away.



Liston Colaco also missed a golden opportunity, curling a right-footed effort wide, summing up a frustrating evening for Mohun Bagan. FC Ravshan, runners-up in the 2023 Tajikistan Higher League, held firm throughout the match, marking their debut in the ACL-II group stage. The competition, formerly known as the AFC Cup, has been restructured with a new format. Teams are divided into two zones, East and West, with 32 teams competing in eight groups.

Naomi Osaka to Begin 2025 Season in Auckland at ASB Tennis Classic

Auckland: Former world No. 1 Naomi Osaka is set to kick off her 2025 season at the ASB Tennis Classic in Auckland this January. The fourtime Grand Slam singles champion is making her return to competitive tennis after an 18-month break, during which she gave birth to her daughter, Shai. Currently ranked 76th in the world, Osaka recently competed in the U.S. Open, where she exited in the second round.

Osaka last played in Auckland in 2017, reaching the quarterfinals. Reflecting on her return to the city, she expressed excitement about revisiting the tournament and the natural beauty of New Zealand. "I am looking forward to just embracing the nature of Auckland and, of course, playing in a tournament that I have not



played in for a long time," said Osaka. "I am excited to return to Auckland. When I was there last time, I was fortunate to go on a helicopter tour and explore the beaches, which I thought were really beautiful. My other memory is that Auckland has the best salmon."

ASB Classic tournament director Nicolas Lamperin is equally thrilled about Osaka's return. "Naomi is one of the premier players in tennis with an exciting and hard-hitting game," Lamperin said.

Suresh Raina: "You Can't Just Turn Up and Perform in Competitive Leagues Like LLC"

New Delhi: As retired cricketers look to continue their playing careers through tournaments like the Legends League Cricket (LLC), former India batter Suresh Raina has emphasized that performing at a high level in such leagues requires players to be at the top of their game.

With LLC's third season starting on September 20, featuring names like Shikhar Dhawan and Dinesh Karthik, Raina highlighted the increasing competitiveness of the league. "The LLC is very competitive now. You're playing on different wickets and facing a lot of superstars like Irfan Pathan, Yusuf Pathan, Chris Gayle, Ambati Rayudu, Robin Uthappa, and myself. You need to be fit to hit a six or bowl four good overs," Raina said, adding that players can't simply retire and join without being prepared for the intensity of the competition.

Ambati Rayudu, another former India cricketer, echoed similar sentiments, saying LLC offers retired players a chance to relive their active playing days. "It's tough to get back into the nets after retirement, but once you do, you start remembering all those moments. We're fortunate to have LLC, which keeps us motivated to stay fit and keep practicing," Rayudu said. Rayudu will play for Konark Suryas Odisha, a debutant team in this season, captained by Irfan Pathan.

Rishabh Pant Gears Up for Test Comeback After 632 Days

Chennai: Under the scorching sun, Rishabh Pant is intensely preparing for his long-awaited return to Test cricket after two years, displaying his characteristic attacking style in the nets. Pant's journey back to the cricket field, after a serious accident that nearly ended his career, is nothing short of remarkable.

It's been 632 days since Pant last played a Test match, coincidentally also against Bangladesh in 2022. Now, the same opposition awaits him for his return on Thursday at the MA Chidambaram Stadium. Despite several promising contenders emerging during his absence, Pant's presence remains highly valued by the team.

Dhruv Jurel, who impressed with his performances in the home series against England, was a strong candidate to continue behind the stumps. However, head coach Gautam Gambhir emphasized the impact Pant brings to the team.

"We all know how destructive he can be as a batter. He has got runs all over



the world, and having someone like him can open the game for us and bring a lot of impact," said Gambhir in a pre-match press conference.

Pant has already made his international comeback in the shorter formats, including being part of India's T20 World Cup-winning squad. However, the challenge of Test cricket requires a different level of skill and mental focus. Pant's readiness for red-ball cricket was evident in his recent performances in the Duleep Trophy, where he impressed both with the bat and behind the stumps. In that match, Pant contributed a blistering 47-ball 61 and took seven catches, five in

the second innings, showcasing his sharp reflexes and agility as a wicketkeeper. Gambhir also praised Pant's work behind the stumps, especially in Indian conditions where keeping against spinners like Ashwin, Jadeja, and Kuldeep can be extremely challenging.

"His batting often overshadows his keeping, but he's done a remarkable job behind the stumps. He brings a lot of value not just as a batter but as a keeper too," Gambhir added.

Beyond his skills, Pant's infectious energy and winning attitude have been highlighted by those who have worked with him. Former Australian captain Ricky Ponting, who coached Pant at Delhi Capitals, described him as a "winner" and a player who plays not just for fun, but to make a meaningful impact.

As Pant prepares for his much-anticipated return to Test cricket, the cricketing world welcomes back the player who brings excitement and flair to every game he plays. Welcome back, Spidey!

IPL 2025 Mega Auction Likely to Take Place in Late November or Early December: Sources

New Delhi: The mega auction for the 2025 edition of the Indian Premier League (IPL) is expected to be held at the end of November or in early December, according to sources within the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI). The official rules and regulations for the auction are set to be released in the coming days.

This will mark the third mega auction in the last decade, with the previous ones taking place in 2014 and 2018. The last

auction in 2018 coincided with the return of Rajasthan Royals and Chennai Super Kings following their two-year suspensions. The 2021 mega auction was delayed by a year due to the COVID-19 pandemic, with teams extending player contracts by an additional year.

BCCI sources confirmed to IANS that the IPL 2025 mega auction is likely to be scheduled for November end or early December. "The rules of the auction will be released in a couple of days," they added.

The upcoming mega auction is expected to follow a similar format to the previous ones, with the event most likely spanning two days. While some franchises advocate for increasing the retention cap to as many as eight players, others are comfortable with maintaining the existing limit of four or five.

Further details about the format and regulations for the IPL 2025 mega auction are expected to be clarified soon by the BCCI.

Dravid Backs Gambhir to Excel as India's New Head Coach

New Delhi: Former India head coach Rahul Dravid has expressed confidence in Gautam Gambhir's ability to succeed in his new role as head coach of the Indian cricket team. Speaking at the launch of 'Roombr,' a digital classroom provider, Dravid praised Gambhir's wealth of experience both as a player and coach.

"He (Gambhir) has got a lot of experience. As a player, he played a lot, and he has also coached quite a bit. I am sure he will do great," Dravid said. "Everyone brings their own knowledge and experience to the table, and I am confident the team will benefit from everything Gautam brings."

Gambhir took over the reins from Dravid after India's successful T20 World Cup campaign in June. Gambhir began his coaching stint with the India team during their tour of Sri Lanka in July/August. Under Dravid's leadership, the team also reached the finals of the ODI World Cup and the World Test Championship.

India is set to begin their Test season under Gambhir on Thursday, starting with a two-match series against Bangladesh. Over the next four months, the team will play 10 Test matches, including three against New Zealand before heading to Australia for a five-match series.