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# From the **Editor's** Desk

The economic toll caused by the pandemic dealt a massive blow to the Indian economy. Investments came to a near halt as anxious investors felt the jitters of the market crash. Nevertheless, India stayed resilient on most fronts.

The country saw years of digital transformation happen in a span of 18 months. New-age startups and established names in business spearheaded the disruption across sectors. Funds pooled in from investors worldwide as China lost its reputation as the "world's factory". At the same time, the pandemicinduced disruptions opened doors for many up-and-coming sectors like the warehouse industry, niche manufacturing sector, and more. Naturally, the markets bounced back, but the trajectory hasn't been linear ever since.

Major sectors like healthcare, real estate, technology, and cryptocurrency are still reeling from the pandemic's effect and juggling between roadblocks and growth possibilities. While the erratic market cycles may trouble the short-term investors. they shouldn't be a cause of worry for the long-term investors. After all, India's economic recovery is going well, despite the problems rising oil prices may pose.

Now, it's up to you to make the call and invest cautiously.

Best, Team Meri Punji



Punji (noun/Hindi) - Capital meaning, wealth in the form of money or other assets owned by a person or organization or available for a purpose such as starting a company or investing

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### **SECTOR REVIEW POST PANDEMIC:** 6 CRYPTOCURRENCY

### **SECTOR REVIEW POST PANDEMIC:** 10 **TECHNOLOGY**

**SECTOR REVIEW POST PANDEMIC:** 12 HEALTH CARE

### SHOULD YOU BUY A SECOND HOME 14 FOR INVESTMENT?

### WEALTH MANAGEMENT IN THE ERA 16 OF COVID-19

WHY DID LUXURY PROPERTY SALES GROW 20 **DURING THE PANDEMIC? AN EXPLAINER** 

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# **SECTOR REVIEW POST PANDEMIC:**

# CRYPTOCURRENCY

One look at the returns of IC15, India's first cryptocurrency index, will show you the dramatic rise of digital

by credible performance data, a shift towards a paperless economy, and favourable laws to regulate the

Return of IC15 vs Other Market Indicators					
Year	IC15	Sensex	Nifty	Gold	S&P500
2018	-50%	8%	6%	-4%	-3%
2019	53%	14%	12%	19%	29%
2020	294%	16%	15%	25%	16%
2021	138%	22%	24%	-3%	27%

# **Crypto Boom After the Pandemic**

According to Chainalysis, cryptocurrency investments in India rose from \$923 million (approx.) in April 2020 to \$6 billion in May 2021. With the rapid adoption of paperless transactions after Covid, crypto exchanges in India have been recording heavy trade volumes month after month. The interest in cryptocurrency, especially in the FinTech space, has clearly increased manifold since the pandemic.

The sector also received institutional support in 2020, as the Supreme Court overturned RBI's 2018 order to ban financial institutions from dealing in crypto transactions. The move created a positive ripple in the crypto community; even gold-obsessed investors came in droves to join the crypto bandwagon.

Why? For one, it offers a hedge in times of economic uncertainty. Since cryptocurrency is a global currency, investors stay protected against country-specific risks. Moreover, it has a limited correlation with other types of asset class, making it a viable option for portfolio diversification like gold. Nonetheless, the see-saw effect from multiple macro factors cannot be overlooked.

# India's Crypto Ecosystem is Changing

The cryptocurrency ecosystem in India has been through a rough patch in the last couple of years. While many investors have accepted the virtual asset, the government is still playing cat and mouse with the industry.

- aware of how "risky" cryptocurrency actually is.
- nitty-gritty.



Gold seems to have met its match in cryptocurrency. Millennials, in particular, have become more inclined towards crypto investments over physical gold as a hedge against inflation. The number of investors touched 20 million last year, of which many hail from semi-urban and rural cities. This is a direct impact of the pandemic as people had more time at hand to study various investment vehicles and become more

Nirmala Sitharaman, the finance minister of India, announced a tax rate of 30% on the income earned from any "virtual digital asset" from April 1st, 2022. Recipients will now have to pay a 1% TDS on every transaction made using a cryptocurrency. Such heavy tax incidence may discourage prospective investors from taking the leap and force industry stakeholders to shift their base to more crypto-friendly nations to innovate. Many experts have called out the biased nature of the tax law and hope for more clarity on its



- industry is suffering from numerous grey areas even today.

Since the pandemic, the new tax law and increase in domestic investors have lent some confidence to the industry. However, there's more confusion than clarity in the sector. But, for now, the ball remains in the government's court.

# Beyond Bitcoin, Ethereum, & Dogecoin

Historically, the 30% tax rate has been reserved for trading assets not deemed economically productive. At the outset, the law sounds like bad news; however, the tax law combined with the government's decision to launch a Central Bank Digital Currency (CBDA) has given the industry stakeholders a ray of hope.

Once we have a balanced benchmark in place, it will open trading doors for various financial products like cryptographed funds and ETFs. Besides, India INX, India's first international stock exchange, has signed an MoU with Torus Kling Blockchain IFSC to launch the country's first cryptocurrency ETF. This will boost the market for digital assets even further.

However, as of now, unclear rules have become massive roadblocks for the sector's growth. Until we have a clear regulatory framework in India, the industry will remain suspended between optimism and fear of a complete shutdown.

India's very own crypto index, 1C15, has been introduced by Cryptowire. It will track the performance of 15 of the most-traded cryptocurrencies globally using a rule-based broad market index. With 1C15 as the benchmark, investors will have much-needed transparency into the generally volatile and speculative movements of the trade. It will also eliminate any tokens that are fundamentally of no value or do not offer a suitable use case. And provide investors still on the fence a viable benchmark for evaluation.

Lastly, the government hostility towards unregulated digital assets isn't a secret. RBI's crackdown on crypto trading in 2018, which continues to persist even today, is a classic example. While the country has kept its distance over fears of financial terrorism and fraud, they are yet to push for a complete ban. The proposed crypto bill also seems to have industry stakeholders on their toes. With no clarity from the policy perspective, the



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# **SECTOR REVIEW POST PANDEMIC:** TECHNOLOGY

When every sector seemed neck-deep in turbulent waters, India's technology sector was cruising the waves on a giant ship called "digitisation".

The revenue numbers speak for themselves. The IT industry is poised to become a USD 227 billion industry in FY2022 with a growth rate of 15.5%. India is seeing a massive inflow of funding for R&D investments and IT startups catering to significant sectors like healthcare, BFSI, retail, education, agriculture, payments, and more. Big names in the industry like Accenture, TCS, and Infosys were ranked in Brand Finance's recent Global 500 IT Services Ranking report. In 2020 alone, India Inc. added over 12 unicorns to their list.

Years of tech stagnation finally took off at a frantic speed in the 18 months of lockdowns and virtual work setups. The result was a much-needed technological reset and a world of opportunity for IT giants and new players.



# The Great Reset is Here

Technology adoption had become seminal for survival during the lockdowns. Now, as the pandemic threat is dying out slowly, the focus is back to business as usual. To survive in today's hyper-digital economy, however, the need for innovative yet resilient IT services and products has grown tenfold. This is clearly demonstrated by the 5.5% increase in IT spending by Indian companies from 2021 to 2022, as reported by Gartner.

- chain.
- migrated to cloud-based platforms and services to enable seamless collaboration and connectivity.
- forces.
- demand for the services helped many retail startups earn a bigger customer base.

# IT's Sunrise Segments 2. Gear for Growth

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Since the pandemic, many firms have joined the cloud While India's technology industry has always been a frenzy to stay afloat amid the new normal. However, hotbed for investments, the business sentiment has they have quickly realised the technology also holds never been higher. Luckily, the Indian government has the key to a better normal. By offering seamless always been eager to nurture and encourage sectoral accessibility from anywhere and cost efficiency to developments. Liberalisation policies like eliminating relieve the already stretched budget, cloud services trade duties on technology products and reducing trade have been a boon since 2020. Today, cloud-based barriers are some examples. Other excellent software consumption is leading the growth of India's government-funded incentives include Export Oriented Units (EOU), Software Technology Parks (STP), Special software segment. Economic Zones (SEZ), and foreign direct investment Moreover, India's IT industry can find ample (FDI). This strong support continues well into 2022 as opportunities by leapfrogging into the 4th industrial well.

revolution and redesigning its product portfolio. Al, Blockchain, Machine Learning, IoT, Big Data, AR/VR, In the Union Budget for FY 2022-2023, the government drone technology, and 3D printing are some of the showed a big love for startups and technology firms. "IT" new-age technologies touted for next-level and "Digital" were at the heart of the budget as the FM disruption. They have already found a market in announced enhanced investments in STEM, blockchain, agricultural drones, secure digital transactions, and drones, 5G devices, domestic manufacturing, and digital custom manufacturing. currency. NASSCOM believes the funding will shape the decade of the technology or the "Techade" in India.

Many enterprise IT leaders have increased spending for investments across AI/ML capabilities, managed However, what happens after the COVID-influenced services, specialised software, cybersecurity, business technology adoption settles for good? If the intelligence, platform BPM, and technology government cushions the industry's growth momentum consulting. However, IT giants aren't the only ones well policy-wise, the IT boom will live on for the next 5-6 closing the deals. Many deep-tech startups have been years to come. roped in to offer niche manufacturing and digital services to MSMEs across the country.

• The IT services sector saw a shift from cost advantage to customer advantage. Many business heads are now focusing on improving customer experience to keep the growth momentum going. Other than CX, they seem keen on adopting technology to boost operational excellence across areas like sales, marketing and supply

• According to NASSCOM, cloud, collaboration, and cybersecurity are the 3Cs at the locus of the postpandemic recovery, and no wonder why. After a pandemic-induced move to hybrid work, many firms have

 Anything as a Service (XaaS) has gained a lot of traction since the COVID-19 crisis. Extreme market digitisation and shift to virtual work have been the key drivers for the hike in demand. Many business chiefs are using pay-as-you-go IT services as a cost-effective yet efficient means to tackle the post-pandemic market

• B2C digitisation was another game-changer for the industry. After months of lockdowns, the demand for ecommerce and digital payments increased among small businesses and Kirana store owners. This explosion of

# Of Policy Refocus & Optimism 3.



# SECTOR REVIEW HEALTH CARE POST PANDEMIC: HEALTH CARE

The pandemic brought to light the barely-holding structural cracks in India's public healthcare system. Decades of under investment in the sector transpired a series of unfortunate events as hospitals ran out of beds, oxygen and critical medical supplies during the pandemic.

On the other hand, the Indian private healthcare sector was caught off guard, being grossly underprepared to deal with a calamity of this stature. In any case, private hospitals and nursing homes with limited beds in India can barely manage the same patient load as their government counterparts.

Safe to say, relevant authorities, as well as the citizenry, realised that the country's healthcare sector could not primarily rest on private medical services and infrastructure. Therefore, the government must intervene strategically by allocating a higher budget for healthcare, providing health insurance subsidies, constructing new medical infrastructure and expanding upon the old one.

Fortunately, all of this is underway post-pandemic.

# India's Health Care Sector is Transforming

After the severe impact of the pandemic, the focus has once again shifted to bolstering India's public and private healthcare, so investors are keeping a close watch. This is a good thing, as investor money and other government and private initiatives are already resulting in the following transformations that stand to benefit all stakeholders.



Only 6.7% of the Indian population lives in metros and mini-metros such as Delhi, Mumbai, Kolkata, Chennai, Pune, Ahmedabad and Bengaluru. While residents here have access to adequate healthcare services, issues arise when patients from nearby districts spill over due to a shortage of beds or specialist care in their area. This was especially visible during the pandemic. To combat such a situation in the future, government and private hospital chains and speciality centres are coming forward to expand the medical infrastructure in tier II and tier III cities. With the primary aim to emergency-proof small cities and towns within the country, relevant authorities are

With the primary aim to emergency-proof small cities and towns within the country, relevant authorities are already establishing small clinics associated with reputed specialists. To further bridge the medical accessibility gap in non-metros and mini-metros, the government is increasing the number of beds per thousand within their establishments.

# **3.** Health Insurance Initiatives for Citizens

The pandemic aftermath has increased the awareness and subsequent uptake of health insurance products. In addition, the government policies including universal health cover, namely, 'Health for All', 'National Digital Health Mission', and 'Ayushman Bharat' have been rolled out. The primary objective behind these policies and schemes is to make health insurance, and therefore health services, more accessible and affordable for Indians.



# Technology Uptick for Remote Medical Consultation

Not everyone stricken by the COVID-19 virus required hospitalisation, but they still needed medical consultation and supervision to recover from the illness, safe and sound. Physically advising swarms of patients was proving near impossible, which gradually led to alternatives like remote care through digital consultations and telehealth adoption.

Telemedicine was at a nascent stage before the pandemic, but as the outbreak reached across borders, the uptake of technology to distribute medical care shot up. The trend will likely continue post-pandemic for non-COVID-related diseases as well. Simply because it offers quick medical advice by experts who practise in metros to patients dwelling in the remotest areas.

Through apps developed by several upcoming medical start-ups and established companies, primary health advisory will become more accessible to remote and vulnerable patient groups at any time of day.



# A Wake-Up Call

Experts predict India's healthcare market will reach a whopping US\$ 372 billion by 2022. Improved healthcare awareness, enhanced accessibility to medical consultation and infrastructure, rise in income and uptake of telemedicine and health insurance solutions are cited as key reasons.

In addition, the government aims to increase its healthcare spending to a total of 2.5% of India's GDP by 2025. This, alongside the expansion of public and private hospitals beyond tier I cities, the opportunity to boost indigenous pharmaceutical manufacturing, PLI schemes offering investment avenues in vaccine and over-the-counter drug research makes India's healthcare sector attractive to investors.

The world seems to be inching towards a post-pandemic society. But, this time with a stark realisation of the importance of strengthening healthcare services both online and offline.



# SHOULD YOU BUY A SECOND HOME FOR

There's hardly a downside to buying a second home especially now, when interest rates on housing finance are at a four-decade low, and annual capital appreciation on real estate is 5%. What's more, second homes can double up as holiday homes, help you avail tax rebates, and become a source of rental income.

So, if you're contemplating a second home purchase, ask the following four questions before committing to an asset of this magnitude.

- What is the primary goal behind the purchase?
- Do you have enough funds?
- What are the alternate financing routes?
- Who will manage the property?

Let's examine the answers to each of these questions individually.



What is the Primary Goal Behind the Purchase?

Your purchase purpose will decide the amount and location of the second house you wish to buy. If your objective is to establish a secondary income source, avoid purchasing a second home on the outskirts. The more you move inside a city, the higher the rental income.

But at the same time, purchasing a second home in an already saturated area isn't ideal either. The returns are generally lower and capital appreciation slower than investing in a developing neighbourhood. So, if you're only looking for capital appreciation or want to flip the house in a couple of years, look for an up and coming neighbourhood. Better yet, opt for construction linked plans in talked-about locations by reliable developers.

Such plans sell quality homes at a low price in underconstruction buildings. And, once they hand over the project, the prices go up significantly.

Lastly, if you're looking for a holiday home, your budget will change based on the location and the luxuries you wish to afford.



You can opt for a home loan to buy a second house, but most banks and NBFCs will only cover 70% to 80% of the property's cost. It is the down payment you need disposable funds for. To make this lump sum payment, you must ensure enough liquidity by combining both savings and income. Since this is a second home, many experts recommend not emptying your savings entirely, even if it means purchasing a relatively smaller house. Do make sure to subtract monthly expenses, including ongoing EMIs and credit card bills, when calculating the down payment to understand your loan affordability.

Let your down payment capacity decide the total loan amount you should borrow, and not the other way around.



Opting for a loan is the obvious way to finance a home purchase, but is it the only way? 99% of all businesses receive funding from family members and friends. Now, this trend is becoming popular in residential real estate as well.

Getting a family member or friend to lend you funds or co-purchase a property can rid you of interest-paid loans. So, pick someone in a position to become your primary financier. But, bear in mind that going through this route will rob you of any tax exemptions you would be eligible for while taking a loan. Weigh the pros and cons accordingly.



While it may seem perfect to purchase a house in a remote location and turn it into a B&B or a small lodge, it's not always practical. A home buyer's job does not end at purchasing their second property. They must consider the tangible and intangible costs of managing it.

For instance, if you live in Delhi but want to invest in a house in your native town of Surat, you must figure out how to care for that property. So, it is ready for rent or sale, depending on your objective. If your parents or siblings are not around to visit the flat or bungalow once in a while, you'll have to hire help.

Even within the same city, managing a second house



Real estate investments lend a significant amount of stability and diversity to your financial portfolio. They are also an excellent avenue for capital appreciation for investors with a long investment horizon. So, if it's not too much of a stretch financially, buy a second home, keeping in mind the answers to the questions listed above.



# WEALTH MANAGEMENT IN THE ERA OF COVID-19

Tiding over your wealth in the era of COVID-19 is no easy feat, but one you shouldn't neglect. To keep your hard-earned savings safe, keep studying the market, diversify your portfolio, avoid under or overinvesting, redistribute wealth in suitable instruments and mitigate the risk exposure.

Also, at this point, growing wealth alone cannot be your priority, even if the pandemic's end might be in sight. You must offset aggressive and highrisk return investments with more stable and lowrisk instruments. It is only by building financial resilience that you can manage your personal wealth in today's extraordinary times.

Let us understand how you can re-chart your wealth management blueprint as the new normal overstays its welcome.

# It's Time for a Portfolio Refocus

### **Define Investment Aptitude**

Before creating (or recreating) a robust financial portfolio, define short and long-term investment goals, returns expectation, risk appetite, and asset class restrictions. This will help you determine your investment aptitude and select suitable investment vehicles.

By listing out investment goals, you can also decide on the percentage of corpus you should dedicate to each instrument. For example, if you wish to earn returns to fund your child's higher education, choosing SIP makes more sense than directly investing in the market, even if you have a high-risk appetite.

Lastly, regardless of your investment aptitude, dedicate a portion of corpus to fixed return instruments like a bank or corporate fixed deposits, government bonds, PPF, NPS, etc. as emergency fund and also to anchor returns. These instruments earn moderate to low returns but mitigate risk and provide tonnes of stability to your portfolio, which is crucial during any unforeseen eventuality.

# **Prioritise Emergency Funds**

Having a dedicated contingency fund has always been an excellent idea, but its relevance has become even more critical after the pandemic.

A recent survey by Scripbox found that the pandemic has made building an emergency corpus the top financial goal for Indians. This financial course correction directly results from lay-offs and sudden medical expenses brought by the pandemic.

However, when creating your emergency corpus, make sure the following two conditions are met-

- It should carry at least 3 to 6 months of your current salary.
- It should be accessible instantly or at short notice without penalty for immediate access. Typically, a separate savings bank account with a net banking facility is an ideal emergency corpus.

# **Invest in Life and Medical Insurance**

The same Scripbox survey also concluded health care investments as the second priority of Indians after the emergency corpus. At least 34% of male participants picked healthcare as their top investment goal.

If anything, the pandemic has taught investors to not compromise on health protection. So, if you have a term plan, keep paying its premiums. If you don't have any medical or health cover, make allowances to buy one for yourself and add your family members to it.

Even if you're empanelled in your office's group medical plan, have a small coverage amount of at least Rs. 5 lakhs to your name. This way, you're always protected, as office insurance only covers you until your job lasts.

# **Pick the Right Investments**

Since the pandemic, your income sources may have become variable. With so much financial uncertainty, your portfolio demands a new investment makeup. Nevertheless, there's no need to entirely overhaul your investment strategy, as was the case for many in 2020 and for some in 2021.

A severe cash crunch pushed several investors to pull out of the market or liquidate part of their savings to cover medical treatment costs or deal with temporary job loss. With a slow and steady recovery, given the vaccination drives and decreasing number of COVID cases, investors can once again consider diversifying their investments. Here's how they can take the first step.

# **1.** Time equity investments

It's no secret that the equity market has been volatile for quite some time now. First, it was the pandemic, now it's the Russia-Ukraine war. Besides, the full recovery of equity markets is linked with corporate earnings, which directly depends on the global economic recovery. It will take a couple more years before we're back to pre-COVID numbers.

Nonetheless, you should not avoid equity and equity related investments. Depending on understanding of financial markets and also time at hand one could choose from direct stock investing or Mutual Funds. If you have a relatively long horizon, say 3 years or more, equity products can bring back satisfying inflation-adjusted returns.

Remember, when the market is volatile, carrying a longer investment horizon lowers your chances of registering losses.

# 2. Don't overlook fixed income product

While the equity market will always face volatilities and will only give very superior returns over long term, fixed-income funds would provide stable returns. Therefore, investment avenues such as corporate and bank fixed deposits, corporate and government bonds, banking and PSU debt funds, PPF and NSC are instruments worth your time.

# 3. Invest in gold

Gold has once again stood the test of time. Even with the heightened economic uncertainty brought along by the pandemic, this precious metal continued to bear substantial returns for its investors.

Instead of purchasing physical gold, investors should consider buying Sovereign Gold Bonds (SGBs). For starters, investing online in SGBs offers you a discount of Rs. 50 per gram. Secondly, you earn an interest return over and above gold's appreciation at 2.50% per annum.

SGBs come with a minimum lock-in period of 5 years, however they are easily tradeable on stock exchanges. Furter if tese bonds are eld till maturity i.e. for 8 years ten they are exempted from capital gains tax. SBs maturity can be laddered to earn tax free income.

# 4. Identify global opportunities

Why not earn significant returns by investing in international equities? International Equity exposure enhances the returns also provides additional diversification. This can be done either Equity funds investing in foreign equities or directly in through certain platforms. If you're new to international equity investments, seek help from a reputed financial advisor.

The key to effective wealth management during and after the pandemic is diversification. The more you diversify your finances, the better, especially if you have a short investment horizon. So, recalibrate your investment aptitude and build your investment portfolio after setting aside ample funds for contingency and insurance.

Doing this will not only boost investment returns but also actively mitigate the risk of losing money, which is critical during these times.



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# WHY DID LUXURY PROPERTY SALES GROW DURING THE PANDEMIC? AN EXPLAINER

Despite the pandemic, India's wealthy showcased a substantial craving for luxury real estate. The segment saw substantial consumption in 2021, barring the second wave, which temporarily robbed the entire property market of its momentum.

The sales of luxury housing went up by a whopping 21% in February, 2021. Another CII-Anarock Consumer Sentiment Survey revealed that more than 34% respondents expressed deep interest in investing in luxury homes ranging between Rs. 90 lakhs to Rs. 2.5 crore. This pressing desire to book luxury properties was fuelled by a variety of reasons.



## Jobs and Businesses Showed Promise

With a reduction in COVID cases, rapid vaccination, and receding threats of another lockdown, a slow yet steady economic recovery started taking place in the latter part of 2021 and is still underway. Businesses were slowly getting back on track, and people started receiving their full salaries on time. These positive developments caused a rise in liquidity.

Once strapped for cash, individuals and businesses could foresee a repository of disposable income affording them higher financial security. Therefore, plans to invest in luxury real estate, which were put on hold earlier, were being realised by HNIs in 2021.

# **Positive Buyer Sentiment Encouraged Purchases**

Nobody was prepared for a health crisis of this stature. It caught everybody off guard and promoted the practice of saving rather than spending money. But 2021 has been the year of coping with the pandemic.

During this time, several individuals realised the fleeting nature of life, which encouraged them to live it well. The climbing sales of luxury housing reflected the sentiment, as was evident from 1.26 lakh luxury housing units sold in Mumbai between January 2021 to May 2021 alone.

# Significant Reduction in Home Loan Interest Rates

Since May 2021, the interest rates on housing finance are the lowest they've been in four decades. So, why not upgrade your lifestyle at a heavily discounted price? Lowered interest rates significantly brought down the total cost of owning a luxury property.

One of the primary reasons banks were able to give out housing finance at such low rates is because RBI continued and still continues to keep its repo rate unchanged at 4%, even when the economy is on an upward trajectory. So, along with a rise in liquidity, HNIs enjoyed the benefit of lower home loan rates, which encouraged luxury property sales.

# Lowered Stamp Duty Played a Substantial Role

Most states had aggressively cut down on stamp duty. For instance, the city with the most expensive residential real estate in India, Mumbai, had reduced its stamp duty from 5% to a meagre 2%. This rate was applicable till December 2020, before slowly going up again.

This reduction led to registered sales of 1.13 lakh properties in the Greater Mumbai area alone between September 2020 and July 2021. This is a stark contrast from September 2019 until July 2020, when the registered sales stood at 42,500, given that the stamp duty was 5% at the time.

In addition to positive buyer sentiment, lowered interest rates, and stamp duty, the workfrom-home culture also contributed to rising luxury property sales. HNIs preferred a relatively large, comfortable and peaceful place to spend their working hours.

As for 2022, the luxury housing segment will continue witnessing a surge with 67% HNIs gearing up to invest in luxury real estate.







Every individual is unique and so are his or her investment needs. Investment planning must always be aligned with one's goals. Hence, our approach is to help you chalk out an investment strategy that is best fit for 'you'.

We see ourselves as educators rather than advisors. Our endeavor is to build awareness about the various kinds of investment products in the market. After all, an informed decision is always a better decision.

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