

RESEARCH

BOB ECONOMICS RESEARCH | CURRENCY OUTLOOK

Fortnightly forex review

JK LAKSHMI CEMENT | TARGET: Rs 637 | -34% | SELL

Volumes slow, headwinds continue – retain SELL

INSURANCE | Q3FY24 REVIEW

Private insurers dominate the quarter

BUILDING MATERIALS | Q3FY24 REVIEW

Soft quarter on poor demand and margin pressure

Daily macro indicators

Indicator	14-Feb	15-Feb	Chg (%)
US 10Y yield (%)	4.26	4.23	(3bps)
India 10Y yield (%)	7.11	7.09	(2bps)
USD/INR	83.03	83.04	0.0
Brent Crude (US\$/bbl)	81.6	82.9	1.5
Dow	38,424	38,773	0.9
Hang Seng	15,879	15,945	0.4
Sensex	71,823	72,050	0.3
India FII (US\$ mn)	13-Feb	14-Feb	Chg (\$ mn)
FII-D	83.3	(13.7)	(97.0)
FII-E	28.1	(316.3)	(344.5)

Source: Bank of Baroda Economics Research

SUMMARY

INDIA ECONOMICS: CURRENCY OUTLOOK

INR has continued to trade in a thin trading range in the fortnight ending 16 Feb 2024, appreciating marginally by 0.03%. This is notwithstanding an increase in the dollar index of more than 1%. While the possibility of Fed rate cuts has been pushed back to Jun'24 which is bolstering the dollar, INR has held its ground. The domestic currency continues to benefit from steady debt inflows, range-bound oil prices, comfortable twin-deficits, continued economic momentum and a strong growth momentum. As a result, we continue to believe that INR is likely to appreciate slowly in an orderly manner and end FY24 at ~82.5/\$. For the fortnight, we expect INR to trade in the range of 82.85-83.15/\$.

[Click here](#) for the full report.

JK LAKSHMI CEMENT

- Q3 volumes grew only 2% YoY due to cold weather and construction halt in northern markets; realisations only steady despite weak volume
- Flat operating cost and weak base led to 455bps YoY EBITDA margin expansion to 15.3%
- Rising competition and high capex-led leverage prompt us to maintain SELL; TP revised to Rs 637 (vs. Rs 551) on rollover

[Click here](#) for the full report.

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INSURANCE: Q3FY24 REVIEW

- SBI Life, our top pick, continues to dominate peers by way of superior growth and market share gains in Q3FY24; LIC posted a recovery
- LIC's VNB margin grew in 9M due to higher non-par share; IPRU and SBI Life saw declines and HDFC Life was stable
- Private players continue to expand bancassurance sales even as agency growth remains in focus as well

[Click here](#) for the full report.

BUILDING MATERIALS: Q3FY24 REVIEW

- Tepid demand climate dampens building material performance in Q3; pipe segment remains the best performer, wood panel the worst
- Maintain cautious stance on building material sector due to soft near-term demand outlook and expensive valuations
- Positive on select names (HINDWARE, MTLM, SOMC) that carry strong earnings prospects and reasonable valuations

[Click here](#) for the full report.

CURRENCY OUTLOOK

19 February 2024

Fortnightly forex review

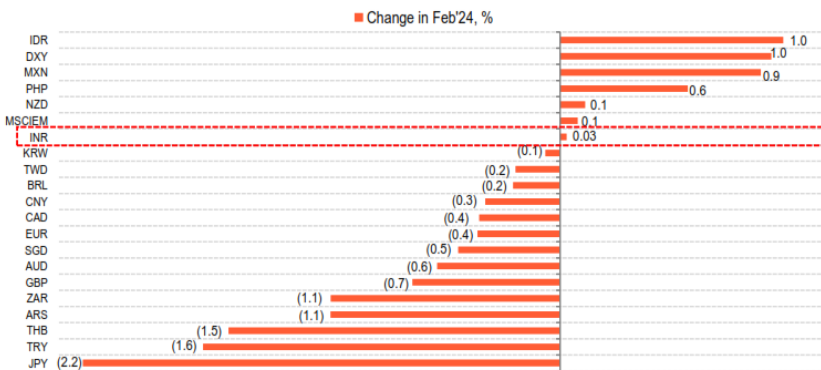
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Sonal Badhan
Economist

Movement in global currencies

In Feb'24, DXY rebounded and rose by 1%. Robust data from the US has led to expectations of a delay in Fed rate cut cycle which was anticipated to begin from Mar'24. Fed officials too have been favouring a wait and watch mode before starting the monetary policy easing cycle. As per the CME FedWatch tool, the probability of rate cut in Mar'24 has fallen to just 10%, compared with over 50% just a month ago. The possibility of a rate cut has been pushed back to Jun'24 (probability of 53.7%). Major currencies have depreciated against the dollar, with JPY leading the pack. JPY depreciated the most by more than 2%, and slipped below the 150/\$ mark. Japan's economic woes, coupled with its ultra-dovish stance continue to weigh on JPY. Amongst other major currencies, both GBP and EUR depreciated by 0.7% and 0.4% respectively. Within EM currencies, the performance was mixed with IDR and MXN appreciating, and BRL and TWD falling against the dollar.

Figure 1: Global currencies in February 2024



Source: Bloomberg, Bank of Baroda Research | Note: Data as of 16 Feb 2024 | Figures in brackets indicate depreciation against the dollar



SELL
 TP: Rs 637 | ▼ 34%

JK LAKSHMI CEMENT

Cement

19 February 2024

Volumes slow, headwinds continue – retain SELL

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Volumes muted, realisations steady: JKLC reported 7%/9% YoY/QoQ revenue growth to Rs 15.9bn in Q3FY24 as volumes grew only 2%/9% YoY/QoQ to 2.4mt (standalone) due to challenging market conditions in the North India. Realisations were steady despite weak volume at Rs 6,438/t, rising 4% YoY (flat QoQ).

Opex flattish despite savings on fuel: Operating cost was flattish YoY (-3% QoQ) at Rs 5,706/t as the fall in energy-adjusted raw material cost by 8%/4% YoY/QoQ to Rs 2,403/t was offset by a 5% YoY (flat QoQ) increase in logistic cost to Rs 1,330/t. Clinker purchase cost per tonne increased 22% YoY due to limited in-house availability. EBITDA for the quarter grew 52%/36% YoY/QoQ to Rs 2.4bn with healthy margin improvement to 15.3% mainly off a weak base. EBITDA/t increased 49%/25% YoY/QoQ to Rs 1,028 and adj. PAT rose 69%/49% YoY/QoQ to Rs 1.2bn.

Expansion plans progressing: UCWL's 1.5mt clinker unit went onstream in Q3FY24 and a 2.5mt grinding unit (GU) is targeted by Q4FY24-end. The 1.4mt GU expansion at Surat is expected by H1FY26. JKLC has also planned the addition of 2.3mt of clinker at the Durg plant (Chhattisgarh) and GU expansion projects of 4.6mt spread across Durg (1.2mt), Uttar Pradesh (1.2mt), Bihar (1.2mt) and Jharkhand (1mt, phase-I) – all to be completed by FY26-end. JKLC's board has approved the acquisition of 85% stake in Agrani Cement, offering access to 335mt of limestone reserves with plans to set up 1mt of clinker and a 1.5mt GU in phase-I.

Maintain SELL: We raise our FY24/FY25 EBITDA estimates by 4%/3% and adj. PAT by 5%/6% to factor in the impact of easing energy costs and healthy northern region realisations. We also introduce FY26 forecasts for the company. In our view, JKLC's performance will be determined by its ability to deliver volumes from the new capacity as its capex is largely backed by debt. We believe persistent balance sheet pressure, high leverage and growing competition in the eastern region will remain key challenges. The stock is trading at 12x FY26E EV/EBITDA. We maintain SELL and continue to value the stock at 8x while rolling valuations over to FY26E for a revised TP of Rs 637 (vs. Rs 551).

Key changes

Target	Rating
▲	◀ ▶

Ticker/Price	JKLC IN/Rs 963
Market cap	US\$ 1.4bn
Free float	54%
3M ADV	US\$ 3.5mn
52wk high/low	Rs 1,000/Rs 607
Promoter/FPI/DII	46%/14%/26%

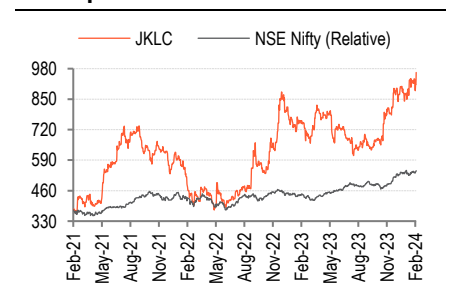
Source: NSE | Price as of 19 Feb 2024

Key financials

Y/E 31 Mar	FY23A	FY24E	FY25E
Total revenue (Rs mn)	60,711	62,049	69,777
EBITDA (Rs mn)	7,043	8,183	9,841
Adj. net profit (Rs mn)	3,308	4,082	4,972
Adj. EPS (Rs)	28.1	34.7	42.2
Consensus EPS (Rs)	28.1	36.0	45.1
Adj. ROAE (%)	12.6	14.1	15.4
Adj. P/E (x)	34.3	27.8	22.8
EV/EBITDA (x)	15.7	13.9	12.3
Adj. EPS growth (%)	(26.4)	23.4	21.8

Source: Company, Bloomberg, BOBCAPS Research

Stock performance



Source: NSE



INSURANCE

Q3FY24 Review

19 February 2024

Private insurers dominate the quarter

- **SBI Life, our top pick, continues to dominate peers by way of superior growth and market share gains in Q3FY24; LIC posted a recovery**
- **LIC's VNB margin grew in 9M due to higher non-par share; IPRU and SBI Life saw declines and HDFC Life was stable**
- **Private players continue to expand bancassurance sales even as agency growth remains in focus as well**

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ULIPs continue to gain traction: ULIPs saw sustained, strong demand in 9MFY24 amid a buoyant stock market. For private insurers under our coverage, ULIP APE grew in the broad range of 11-57% YoY, with HDFC Life in the lead (though SBI Life led in absolute terms). Protection APE increased by 4-24% YoY and had mixed trends – whereas SBI Life saw a decline in individual protection business but robust growth in group protection, HDFC Life and IPRU saw quite the opposite. Though ULIPs and protection plans normally make up a small fraction of LIC's APE, the company gained traction in non-par business this time round while private players suffered a downturn.

LIC's VNB margins rise, private players hurt by product mix: LIC reported 200bps YoY expansion in VNB margin to 16.6% in 9MFY24 due to an increase in its non-par portfolio. As the product mix shifted toward ULIPs in 9M, private life insurers were unable to maintain the higher margins reported in FY23, when demand for non-par products had risen. IPRU's VNB margin contracted 530bps YoY to 26.7% in 9M and HDFC Life reported a flat print. SBI Life's margin fell 150bps YoY to 28.1% but remained the best among our coverage.

SBI Life tops premium growth, LIC recovers: LIC posted a pickup in net premium growth to 5% YoY and NBP growth to 6% in Q3FY24. Net premium for our private insurer universe grew in a range of 5-16% YoY, with SBI Life heading the pack and retaining market leadership. IPRU registered single-digit growth YoY in Q3 and 9M, on both individual APE and APE basis, whereas HDFC Life's overall APE contracted in the December quarter owing to a slowdown in big-ticket policies (>Rs 0.5mn). LIC's individual APE market share fell to 33% in 9M (30% in Q3) from 34% in FY23.

Banking channel a key driver, agent addition on the anvil as well: LIC continues to command the largest, most productive agency force among life insurers. SBI Life and HDFC Life have aggressively moved to swell their agent ranks by 26% and 19% YoY respectively as at end-9M. Bancassurance remains the major driver for private insurers, except IPRU where business originated by parent ICICIBC remains low.

Top pick: SBI Life (BUY, TP Rs 1,970) remains our top life insurance pick.

Recommendation snapshot

Ticker	Price	Target	Rating
HDFCLIFE IN	592	850	BUY
IPRU IN	512	556	HOLD
LICI IN	1,040	1,140	HOLD
SBILIFE IN	1,508	1,970	BUY

Price & Target in Rupees | Price as of 16 Feb 2024



Soft quarter on poor demand and margin pressure

- Tepid demand climate dampens building material performance in Q3; pipe segment remains the best performer, wood panel the worst
- Maintain cautious stance on building material sector due to soft near-term demand outlook and expensive valuations
- Positive on select names (HINDWARE, MTLM, SOMC) that carry strong earnings prospects and reasonable valuations

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Tepid topline: Our building material universe clocked subdued revenue growth of 2.9% YoY in Q3FY24 due to a weak demand environment and a sharp drop in raw material prices. However, our universe EBITDA grew at a healthy 13.4% YoY due to a low base (-21% in Q3FY24). On a 4Y CAGR basis, EBITDA grew at a moderate pace of 10.2% in Q3. Sector-wise, the plastic pipe segment performed relatively better due to sustained demand from housing and infrastructure, whereas the wood panel segment performed the worst. Company-wise, SI fared the best in plastic pipes, HINDWARE in bathware, KJC in tiles and MTLM in wood panels.

Pipes: Our pipe universe EBITDA continued to grow at a healthy 17.1% YoY (4Y CAGR: +15.1%) in Q3FY24. We observed that large players (SI, ASTRA) posted strong volume growth, whereas small and midsize companies reported low volumes due to higher competitive intensity.

Bathware: Our bathware universe EBITDA was down 10.4% YoY in Q3 due to soft demand (revenue flat YoY) and sharp margin compression (-165bps YoY to 13.8%) on account of heavy brand spending during the Cricket World Cup.

Tiles: Our tiles universe volumes grew at a muted 1% YoY (4Y CAGR: +5.4%) for the quarter on account of poor demand and higher competition from Morbi players. However, EBITDA grew at a healthy 37.0% YoY (4Y CAGR: +11.9%) off a low base.

Wood panels: Our wood panel universe EBITDA contracted (-4.5% YoY) for the sixth straight quarter due to a dull demand environment and margin stress from high import pressure in MDF and particleboard and elevated timber prices.

Cautious on sector, selective on stocks: Our building material universe is trading at 41.3x on 1Y forward P/E vs. the 5Y average of 32.7x. We remain cautious on the sector amid a weak near-term demand outlook and high valuations. Even so, we are positive on select names – HINDWARE (BUY, TP Rs 600), MTLM (BUY, Rs 300), SOMC (BUY, TP Rs 900) – where we see relatively better earnings prospects and reasonable valuations. Our report of 17 January, [Strong foundations](#), has details.

Recommendation snapshot

Ticker	Price	Target	Rating
APOLP IN	759	600	SELL
ASTRA IN	1,967	2,000	HOLD
CPBI IN	726	700	HOLD
CRS IN	7,461	7,700	HOLD
FNXP IN	225	230	HOLD
GREENP IN	363	400	HOLD
GRLM IN	547	500	HOLD
HINDWARE IN	426	600	BUY
KJC IN	1,270	1,400	HOLD
MTLM IN	243	300	BUY
PRINCPIN IN	594	650	HOLD
SI IN	4,056	4,300	HOLD
SOMC IN	672	900	BUY

Price & Target in Rupees | Price as of 19 Feb 2024



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BUY – Expected return >+15%

HOLD – Expected return from -6% to +15%

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Note: Recommendation structure changed with effect from 21 June 2021

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