

Singapore firms eye opportunities in Uttar Pradesh state



The Singapore Pavilion at the Uttar Pradesh Global Investors Summit, which was held from Feb 10 to 11 in Lucknow. PHOTO: SGININDIA/TWITTER

[Nirmala Ganapathy](#) and [Debarshi Dasgupta](#)

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NEW DELHI - Singaporean entrepreneur Saurabh Mangla is excited about setting up a school for training Indian artisans in making furniture in the Indian state of Uttar Pradesh.

Launched in 2016, ipse ipsa ipsum (himself, herself and itself in Latin) is a Singaporean furniture brand he founded that works with Indian artisans and Singaporean designers to fuse contemporary designs with traditional craft as they create bespoke furniture.

Plans for the school are at a very early stage, said Mr Mangla, 42, who hopes to train artisans in modern furniture techniques and learnings coming out of Singapore.

“The idea is to partner with some institutes of higher learning... Singapore can play a role in the furniture school – we have a robust furniture ecosystem,” he said.

In Singapore, ipse ipsa ipsum has a showroom in Tan Boon Liat Building, a hub of home and decor retailers, as well as an online store.

It also has a presence in Uttar Pradesh, having opened an arts and crafts centre in Moradabad city – where the school is also being planned – in 2020 before the Covid-19 outbreak.

Mr Mangla said he chose the state because it has a rich artisanal tradition, such as in wooden inlay work.

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The northern state has drawn a clutch of other Singapore firms that are developing various ventures ranging from infrastructure to waste management.

In what has come as a boost to Singapore’s presence in the state, the Republic and the Uttar Pradesh government also [signed a memorandum of cooperation in February](#) for collaboration across various sectors, including urban development and skills training and development of sustainable industrial parks.

A project that has attracted significant attention is the [construction of Noida International Airport](#) that is expected to begin operations

by the end of 2024 and serve the wider National Capital Region around Delhi.

Airport service company Sats is working to build a multi-modal cargo hub at this greenfield airport, and Surbana Jurong, along with its member company SMEC, is helping to design some of the key infrastructure there such as the terminal and access roads.

Surbana Jurong Group is also involved in a pilot smart water social project in Ayodhya district that seeks to boost potable water supply and deliver water to vulnerable communities.

“Uttar Pradesh presents a diverse range of growth opportunities,” said Ms Audrey Tan, director for South Asia at Enterprise Singapore, which led a business delegation of 21 companies to an investor summit in the state in February.

“Uttar Pradesh, particularly in the Greater Noida area, is undergoing major developments to strengthen its position as an upcoming transport and logistics hub for northern India.”

Enterprise Singapore, she said, had supported Singapore companies’ market entry into Uttar Pradesh and would continue to do so.



Singapore furniture brand ipse ipsa ipsum's arts and crafts centre in Moradabad, Uttar Pradesh. PHOTO: IPSE IPSA IPSUM

In Greater Noida, Mr Prashant Singh, co-founder and chief executive of Blue Planet Environmental Solutions, is getting ready to inaugurate an integrated solid waste management project that will cater to over 11,000 households.

The firm will pick up waste using compressed natural gas vehicles, and segregate and break it down so that only 10 per cent of the waste needs to go to a landfill.

“We are building a truly integrated waste management facility,” said Mr Singh.

Uttar Pradesh is India’s most populous state, with approximately 230 million people. But it accounts for just 8 per cent of India’s gross domestic product and, in terms of industrialisation, has lagged behind states like Gujarat and Tamil Nadu that have aggressively wooed foreign firms in recent years.

India’s fourth-largest state in terms of area has a lot to catch up on, with just around US\$1 billion (S\$1.3 billion) in foreign direct investment between October 2019 and September 2022.

In comparison, the smaller states of Karnataka and Gujarat received US\$39 billion and US\$30 billion in foreign direct investment respectively in the same period.

Uttar Pradesh is led by Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, 50, of the governing Bharatiya Janata Party, who some say could one day succeed Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

The party has been keen to attract foreign investment into Uttar Pradesh – a politically important state with 80 seats in the Lower House of Parliament, the largest for any state, and home to Mr Modi’s constituency, Varanasi.

On top of ramping up infrastructure, Uttar Pradesh has initiated several business-friendly measures such as subsidies for a wider range of projects and investments, as well as a dedicated one-stop portal to manage each stage of the investor life cycle.

“The investment atmosphere in Uttar Pradesh has improved multifold,” said Sats. “Government departments are functioning with high efficiency, labour laws are being simplified and complete support is being provided by the state to companies to set up manufacturing facilities.”

Surbana Jurong added that bureaucratic procedures had impacted the ease of doing business in Uttar Pradesh in the past, but noted change was afoot, with the Noida airport being “an example of a project that is moving at breathtaking speed”.

Mr Neil Parekh, chairman of the Singapore Indian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, said Uttar Pradesh offered a lot of opportunities, including a large market.

“Uttar Pradesh historically perhaps was not seen as the best place to invest in, in the past. I think the needle has moved significantly in

the past five to seven years and that is the reason why there is an attractiveness to go to Uttar Pradesh,” he said.

While he lauded the state government for its “very good start”, he added: “The challenges to me are there is a lot to be done in Uttar Pradesh for providing some of the same stability that most companies are used to in other parts of the world and in some other parts of India.”