

INDIA'S INFOSYS POSTS 16% RISE IN Q4 PROFIT

BANGALORE: Indian software giant Infosys yesterday reported a 16 percent jump in fourth-quarter net profit, beating expectations after it won new clients for its IT services business.

Net profit in the three months to March 31 came in at 36 billion rupees (\$540 million), compared with 31 billion rupees in the same period last year. It beat analysts' estimates of quarterly profit of 35.2 billion rupees in a survey compiled by Bloomberg.

A strong performance had been expected after the firm in January said it had managed to ride out deadly floods in Chennai at the end of last year that many feared would hurt earnings.

Revenues for the full year rose 17 percent to 624 billion rupees, Infosys said, as it

added 325 new clients. In January, chief operating officer UB Pravin Rao said a "healthy pipeline" of potential deals worth \$3 billion would help the Bangalore-based firm achieve its growth projections.

Shares in Infosys had closed slightly down at 1,172.05 rupees on Wednesday on the Bombay Stock Exchange, with markets closed Thursday and Friday for public holidays. India has become a back office to the world as companies have subcontracted work to firms such as Infosys, taking advantage of the country's skilled English-speaking workforce.

Infosys is listed on stock exchanges in Mumbai and New York and was once seen as the bellwether of India's flagship outsourcing industry and the country's equivalent to Microsoft. — AFP



BANGALORE: Infosys employees leave a pyramid shaped building at their company's headquarters in Bangalore yesterday. — AP



PARIS: The Microsoft logo in Issy-les-Moulineaux, outside Paris, France. Microsoft opened a new front in the battle over digital privacy this week, suing the Justice Department on Thursday over its use of court orders requiring the company to turn over customer files stored in its computer centers often without notifying the customer involved. — AP

MICROSOFT SUIT IS LATEST TECH CLASH WITH US OVER PRIVACY

AUTHORITIES WANT ACCESS TO MESSAGES, PICTURES AND RECORDS

SAN FRANCISCO: As we live more of our lives online, the companies we trust with our digital secrets are increasingly clashing with authorities who want access to the messages, pictures, financial records and other data we accumulate in electronic form.

Microsoft opened a new front in the battle over digital privacy this week, suing the Justice Department over its use of court orders requiring the company to turn over customer files stored in its computer centers - often without notifying the customer involved. It's the latest in a series of legal challenges brought by Microsoft and some of its leading competitors. Apple recently fought a high-profile battle over the FBI's demand for help unlocking an encrypted iPhone in San Bernardino, California, and it's continuing to challenge similar demands in other cases. Other companies, including Google, Facebook and Yahoo, have increased their use of encryption. They've also sued for the right to report how often authorities demand customer information under national security laws, after former National Security Agency contractor Edward Snowden leaked details of

government data-gathering efforts.

Privacy advocates have applauded those moves, while authorities complain they could stymie legitimate investigations. But those legal maneuvers may benefit the companies as well as their customers. In the wake of Snowden's revelations and high-profile hacking attacks, tech firms want to reassure customers their information is safe.

"Privacy is an economic good at this point," said Jennifer Daskal, a former Justice Department attorney who now teaches law at American University in Washington, DC. "It's good for business because consumers care about it. So the companies are competing over being privacy protective."

Many tech companies make money directly from customer information, of course, by selling advertising targeted to their users' interests and behavior. While some privacy advocates have criticized those practices, others note that's different from handing over information to authorities who have the power to put people in jail.

In the latest case, Microsoft Corp says the US Justice Department is using a

decades-old law to obtain court orders for customers' data, while in some cases prohibiting the company from notifying the customer. Microsoft says those "non-disclosure" orders violate its constitutional right to free speech, as well as its customers' protection against unreasonable searches.

Microsoft is also fighting a court battle in New York over the government's demand for emails of a non-US citizen that the company has stored in a data center located in Ireland. Microsoft President Brad Smith has argued the case could open the door to other governments demanding information stored in the United States.

As people and businesses store more information on their electronic gadgets, or online in corporate data centers, "these companies are increasingly the intermediary between the government and our own privacy," said Daskal.

One former federal official was critical of Microsoft's latest lawsuit. Daniel "D.J." Rosenthal, a former Justice Department lawyer, said it could lead to warning "child molesters, domestic abusers, violent criminals and terrorists that they're being investigated." — AP

FARM TECHNOLOGY HELPS CLEAN UP NAIROBI'S DRINKING WATER

MURANG'A, Kenya: Samuel Kinuthia knows how to make the most of technology. Using a technique called basin terracing, he has boosted his income at his farm in Murang'a county, and helped provide Kenyans as far away as Nairobi with better access to clean drinking water.

Kinuthia and a group of 300 farmers in Kiaruta village are turning hilly land into more productive farmland through basin terracing. It also reduces soil erosion, which can choke central Kenya's rivers and pollute drinking water. On a sunny morning, Kinuthia and two employees are preparing a fresh strip of land to sow crops on his three-acre farm.

First they dig across a hilly patch to make it into a flat terrace. They then dig square holes to form basins on the strip, where Kinuthia will plant vegetables.

"I used to plant maize and beans but I could not harvest much," he said. "With basin terracing, I can plant fresh produce like tomatoes, kale and onions. Both the harvest and the resulting income improve because there is a ready market." Fred Kihara, water fund manager in Kenya for The Nature Conservancy (TNC), an international environmental organization, explained that the technology reduces the amount of soil being eroded away into rivers.

"It also increases the amount of water that is being retained in the soil," he added. A 2015 study by TNC says the Upper Tana basin - which provides water to an estimated 9 million Kenyans - is a watershed under pressure.

About 65 percent of the farmers questioned by the group said the productivity of their land had declined even though they use more fertilizers than five years ago. Overall, 80 percent reported a decrease in rainfall in recent years. From Kinuthia's farm in the Upper Tana basin, the view is of stretches of hilly terrain that have been stripped bare of trees. The red soil is easily blown away or eroded.

PROTECTING SOURCE WATER

Farming on hilly land has increased the amount of soil ending up in rivers that feed the country's largest water reservoir, the Ndakaini dam, in central Kenya.

In Nairobi alone, 85 percent of water - or 70 million cubic metres - is supplied by the dam, around 80 kilometres away, according to officials from the Nairobi City Water and Sewerage Company. More sediment turns the water cloudy, they say. Soil runoff can include manure and fertiliser used on farms, which may pollute drinking water and make people sick, said Philip Muthui, the company's production manager.

He hopes that the use of basin terracing by farmers will reduce erosion into rivers, thus protecting Ndakaini water. Currently, the cost of removing the sediment and treating water at Ndakaini ranges between six and seven Kenyan shillings (\$0.06-\$0.07) per cubic metre, which Muthui says is too high.

"Reducing sediment load into rivers has cut the cost of treating water by about three percent," he added. Efforts to reduce erosion in the Upper Tana basin have been supported by the Nairobi Water Fund, a \$10 million public-private partnership between TNC, the Nairobi City Water and Sewerage Company and the Kenyan government, among others. — Reuters