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Tesla's India strategy sees the setback of capabilities and regulatory approvals to offer fully automatic services of its cars. BLOOMBERG

Tesla drives India with top hands in foreign shores

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NEW DELHI

American electric vehicle (EV) giant Tesla's long-awaited India entry is taking shape, but with some quirks. For one, there's no heavyweight local captain at the wheel yet. The foray is being led remotely by the company's Asia-Pacific executives.

For another, it is lapping up sales and business executives from rivals Mercedes-Benz, BMW, and MG Motor India, but at junior-to-mid experience levels.

Then, the hype of its entry is dimmed somewhat by the absence of glitz in showrooms that its luxury rivals flaunt, even as it aims for the rich consumer with cars priced upwards of ₹60 lakh.

Experts said the hiring strategy and placement of stores in wealthy corners of cities like Delhi and Mumbai is a sign that Tesla will solely focus on the niche premium luxury market.

"Given how Tesla is positioning itself in the Indian market, they will need executives with experience of premium cars," Amit Kaushik, managing director at auto ana-

lytics firm Urban Science India, said. "However, what has been notable is that the company has not gone for a very senior hire to drive its foray in the Indian market."

The company utilized its senior executives in Hong Kong to train and support the new sales representatives deployed by the company here in India, according to two people aware of the matter.

Public social media posts by Tesla's new hires indicate that Andy Lo, learning and development manager at Tesla and Kenneth Lui, regional sales manager of certain South East Asian nations, were among the executives spearheading the training processes.

Along with bolstering sales presence, Tesla also hired executives from firms like Jio-bp to help expand its charging network in the country. For instance, it hired Atanu Pramanik in April, a former deputy general manager of EV Charger Operations at Jio-bp.

Sagar Tripathi, handling business development and enterprise sales at Tesla, joined in June from MG Motor where he was lead of dealer development of the western

Tesla pilots India drive from overseas

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region.

Most of the hires are from junior to mid-level, with maximum experience around 10-15 years. In the absence of a senior Indian hand, executives from Asia Pacific region are leading the firm's charge.

Isabelle Fan, Tesla regional director for South East Asia, led the company's launch in the Indian market. During her presentation to mediapersons on Monday in the national capital, Fan highlighted that new locations for showrooms will be decided based on interest for vehicles and feedback from the Indian team.

The company has disclosed that it is working on service centres in Delhi NCR and Mumbai, and installing a supercharger in Bengaluru, with first deliveries scheduled to begin from September.

A request for comment from Tesla remained unanswered till press time.

While the industry pieces together the strategy of the latest entrant from its public moves, Tesla executives refuse to take any questions on its strategy, booking numbers, or about competition from Chi-



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nese rival BYD, which has managed to dethrone it as the number one electric vehicle (EV) seller of the world.

"We are not allowed to discuss details about any plan yet," one Tesla executive present at the launch said, adding that the company doesn't have a dedicated base in India yet from where it is crafting its strategy.

Kaushik said that the Indian market is unique and Tesla's cars will also have to pass the test of Indian roads, especially

given their low ground clearance compared to SUVs of Indian car makers.

While the positioning of its cars is luxury, Tesla's show-

room in Delhi stood out for its no-frills approach with bare minimum extra features, unlike its rivals like Mercedes and BMW which have been working on increasing the

premium experience for customers.

Tesla's Delhi showroom, located in a posh locality of Aerocity, displays two variants

of Model Y priced at ₹59 lakh and ₹67 lakh.

Anurag Singh, advisor at Primus Partners, a consultancy, suggests that Tesla is looking to woo customers using a combination of its premium digital capabilities and work processes that it is known for globally.

"As of today, they will have to pay high duties, (cars) would be priced high and, hence, would have to target the premium customers first," Singh said.

However, Tesla's strategy in India faces the limitation of capabilities and regulatory approvals to offer fully automatic services of its cars, for which it is known globally. The company's chief executive officer Elon Musk has repeatedly bet on increasing automation of its cars, and is focusing on robocabs in its home market.

But in India, it has been forced to offer a basic advanced driver assistance system (ADAS) in the Model Y.

The company's entry is also coming at a time when India's luxury car market reached an all time high of 51,000 units sold in FY25, but saw growth slow to 3%.

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