

ALTERNATIVE | SMOKING

Last year, Centre had advised states to stop the sale of e-cigarettes

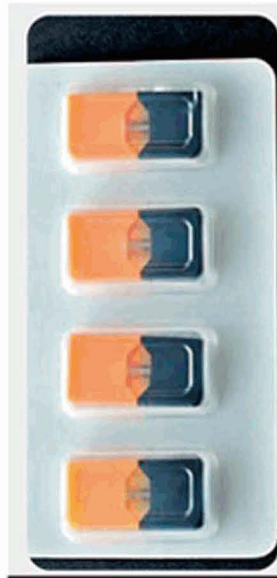
Juul plans to enter Indian e-cigarette market

New Delhi/Los Angeles, Jan. 30: US-based electronic cigarette firm Juul Labs is hoping to launch its products in India by late 2019, a person familiar with the strategy told *Reuters*, marking one of its boldest bets to expand away from its home turf.

After recruiting Uber India executive Rachit Ranjan as a senior public policy strategist, Juul this month hired India-based Mastercard executive Rohan Mishra as head of government relations.

It plans to hire at least three more executives, including an India general manager, LinkedIn job postings showed. It also plans "a new India subsidiary", according to one posting.

"It (the plan) is currently at an exploratory stage,



■ **AS PART** of its evaluation, Juul said it would consult with the Indian Journal of Clinical Practice, a healthcare communications firm.

■ **ONE OF** the journal's editors is a former president of the Indian Medical Association, K.K. Aggarwal, who has publicly voiced his support for e-cigarettes.

■ **JUUL WOULD** face competition from leading players in India's \$10 billion cigarette market - ITC and Godfrey Phillips - which sell such electronic devices as well.

■ **INDIA'S** vapour-products market was valued at only \$15.6 million in 2017, according to Euromonitor International, but it is expected to grow by nearly 60 percent a year up to 2022.

but the company needs people on the ground in India," the source said.

Juul's sleek vaping devices, which resemble a

USB flash drive and offer flavors such as mango and creme, are a sensation in the US but have drawn tighter regulatory scruti-

ny due to surging use among teenagers.

Juul devices, like most electronic cigarettes, vaporize a liquid contain-

ing nicotine, the addictive stimulant that gives smokers a rush.

Advocates for the devices say that they are far less of a health threat because users don't inhale the dangerous matter taken into the lungs through cigarette smoking.

Opponents argue the devices still involve addictive chemicals and can be a gateway to cigarette smoking, especially for the young.

The push to launch in India is part of the company's broader Asia strategy. India has 106 million adult smokers, second only to China in the world, making it a lucrative market for firms such as Juul and Philip Morris.

However, India's regulatory environment for tobacco and electronic cig-

arettes is highly restrictive. The health ministry last year advised states to stop the sale or import of e-cigarettes, saying they pose a "great health risk".

Eight of India's 29 states currently ban e-cigarettes.

Juul is studying federal and state regulations that could block its plans, the source said, adding that it would engage with the medical community to build acceptance for the devices.

Juul said in a statement India was among the Asian markets under evaluation, but there were no "definitive plans".

"As we explore potential markets, we are engaging with health regulators, policymakers and other key stakeholders," the company said.

— Reuters