

Corpsec Hotline

August 10, 2007

VENTURE CAPITAL FUNDS: TAKING AN OFFSHORE FLIGHT WITH CLIPPED WINGS

With the growth in size and sophistication of the private equity industry in India, domestic players have felt the need to invest globally. Further, in the recent past, there have been instances where domestic VCFs would have benefited from participating in VCUs which had operations in India, however, due to lack of any guidelines with respect to the same, these potential benefits could not be enjoyed.

The Securities and Exchange Board of India (“SEBI”) in response has enacted new regulations allowing domestic private equity players to make cross border investments, albeit with certain conditions.

Vide its amendment to the SEBI (Venture Capital Funds) Regulations, 1996 (“Regulations”) introduced in the year 2006, in the form of insertion of Regulation 12 (ba), investment in securities of foreign companies was envisaged subject to conditions or guidelines that were yet to be stipulated or issued by the Reserve Bank of India (“RBI”) and the SEBI from time to time. Thus, although the Regulations provided for the enabling provision with respect to VCFs being permitted to invest in securities of foreign companies abroad, the operational mechanism for the same was pending. It may be noted that RBI had on April 30, 2007, in consultation with SEBI, permitted VCFs to invest abroad in equity and equity linked instruments upto a ceiling of USD 500 million. RBI had also subsequently clarified that once SEBI’s approval was obtained, no separate RBI approval would be required for the offshore investments.

On August 9, 2007, SEBI brought fruition to the needs of the domestic private equity players by finally introducing the norms for investments overseas.

Under the circular dated August 09, 2007 (Circular), SEBI has enlisted the following conditions for registered VCFs desirous of making investments in offshore Venture Capital Undertakings (“VCUs”):

- Total investment limit in offshore Venture Capital Undertakings (“VCUs”) is capped at US\$ 500 million to invest in equity and equity linked instruments only. An Offshore VCU would mean a foreign company whose shares are not listed on any of the stock exchanges in India or abroad. The allocation of investment limits would be done on ‘first come- first serve’ basis, depending on the availability within the overall limit of US\$ 500 million. Application for allocation for further investment limit shall be by way of a fresh application;
- Investments can be made only in those companies which have an Indian connection (i.e. companies which have front offices overseas, while the back office operations are in India);
- Such investments can be upto 10% of the investible funds of the VCF;
- Investments need to be made within 6 months, if not made; SEBI can re-allocate the unutilized investment limit to other applicants; and
- No separate RBI approval is required after SEBI approval is given.

While these much awaited guidelines will see VCFs queuing up to get their quota of the US\$ 500 million pie, the guidelines are surely restrictive in nature. For example, VCFs will be only permitted to make investments in equity or equity linked instruments of these offshore VCUs. Thus, they may not be permitted to make debt investments, or even participate in offshore IPOs of these VCUs.

Further, the offshore VCU must have an Indian connection, and a technical reading of the guidelines provides for investment only in offshore VCUs which have outsourcing units in India. Thus, the guidelines may not permit investment into offshore VCUs which do not have a back office in India, but may nonetheless have an Indian connection by way of other business operations, like manufacturing units, etc. Further, by providing a front office-back office relationship, a technical interpretation of the guidelines may also mean that the VCFs may not be able to invest in foreign companies, who outsource a substantial portion of their operations to Indian companies, but do not have a “back office” in India. Maybe SEBI should have considered not imposing such a strict parameter, but alternatively could have linked the investment eligibility to certain other parameters which would create value in India, like percentage of operational expenses in India, supply chain in India, etc.

As per these guidelines, the offshore investment by VCFs has been restricted to upto 10% of their investible funds. The definition of investible funds has been provided in the Regulations to mean the corpus of the fund net of expenses. While the industry had been demanding a higher limit in this regard, SEBI has not really adhered to the demands of the industry, and has instead restricted the investment to 10%.

Research Papers

M&A In The Indian Technology Sector

February 19, 2025

Unlocking Capital

February 11, 2025

Fintech

January 28, 2025

Research Articles

Re-Evaluating Press Note 3 Of 2020: Should India’s Land Borders Still Define Foreign Investment Boundaries?

February 04, 2025

INDIA 2025: The Emerging Powerhouse for Private Equity and M&A Deals

January 15, 2025

Key changes to Model Concession Agreements in the Road Sector

January 03, 2025

Audio

Securities Market Regulator’s Continued Quest Against “Unfiltered” Financial Advice

December 18, 2024

Digital Lending - Part 1 - What’s New with NBFC P2Ps

November 19, 2024

Renewable Roadmap: Budget 2024 and Beyond - Part I

August 26, 2024

NDA Connect

Connect with us at events, conferences and seminars.

NDA Hotline

Click here to view Hotline archives.

Video

Arbitration Amendment Bill 2024: A Few Suggestions | Legally Speaking With Tarun Nangia | NewsX

February 12, 2025

Thus, while SEBI has provided the first step for overseas investments, SEBI may consider liberalizing and relaxing them in due course of time, and give more flexibility to domestic players, considering the restrictive reach of the guidelines. Meanwhile, considering the recent change in the tax laws which diluted the benefits of SEBI registration, this step may act as an incentive for domestic funds to get registered with SEBI considering the fact that unregistered funds may not be permitted to invest abroad.

Source: [SEBI/VCF/Cir.no 1/98645/2007](#)

- **Anupam Prasad & Parul Jain**

You can direct your queries or comments to the authors

DISCLAIMER

The contents of this hotline should not be construed as legal opinion. View detailed disclaimer.

This Hotline provides general information existing at the time of preparation. The Hotline is intended as a news update and Nishith Desai Associates neither assumes nor accepts any responsibility for any loss arising to any person acting or refraining from acting as a result of any material contained in this Hotline. It is recommended that professional advice be taken based on the specific facts and circumstances. This Hotline does not substitute the need to refer to the original pronouncements.

This is not a Spam mail. You have received this mail because you have either requested for it or someone must have suggested your name. Since India has no anti-spamming law, we refer to the US directive, which states that a mail cannot be considered Spam if it contains the sender's contact information, which this mail does. In case this mail doesn't concern you, please unsubscribe from mailing list.

What India's Transition to New Data Protection Law Means for Global Businesses

January 23, 2025

India 2025: The Emerging Powerhouse for Private Equity and M&A Deals

January 16, 2025
