

CEOs working from home conduct meetings via VCs

During free time, the CEOs are practising yoga, reading books, or cooking

DEV CHATTERJEE
Mumbai, 22 March



(From left) Tata group Chairman N Chandrasekaran, Mahindra Group Chairman Anand Mahindra and Bajaj Auto CEO and MD Rajiv Bajaj are working from home

With high-end technology and gadgets at their disposal, top Indian chief executive officers (CEOs) and promoters are making full use of working from home by attending board and management meetings through video conferencing (VC) and getting daily sales and production reports via WhatsApp.

In a perfect example of work-life balance, during free time, CEOs are meditating, practising yoga or cooking for their family members.

Indian CEOs like Tata group Chairman N Chandrasekaran, Mahindra Group Chairman Anand Mahindra, RPG Enterprises Chairman Harsh Goenka, Bajaj Auto CEO and MD Rajiv Bajaj are working from home and are making sure that all office staff are also safe and sound while company' opera-

tions are not affected. Mailers have gone from the CEO offices that no staff should be asked to travel and only the 'mission critical' staff should be asked to come to work. The CEOs have also identified 25 per cent employees in the top rung who are needed for day-to-day running of company's operations across India and the world.

"For the past few days, I see almost no loss of efficiency so far, barring my inability to review new product sketches models and prototypes. All other discussions are often sharper and crisper," said Bajaj. "On the upside, work from home saves travel time, congestion and pollution. I am also getting more time for my dogs, yoga and swimming," he said.

With the government extending the *janata* curfew until March 31, the CEOs have instructed their employees not to venture out and avoid unnecessary travel and help the nation fight the virus, even if it means monetary losses for few weeks.

Mahindra, who is working from home, tweeted that the group's project team would assist the government and the army in erecting temporary care facilities. The group is also immediately begin working on making ventilators and its Mahindra Holidays resorts are ready to be converted as temporary care facilities.

Harsh Goenka, who is also working from home and is a social media influencer, listed several ways how to spend time at home by praying, exercising, painting, and watching TED talks among other activities.

According to the CEOs, it is important to remain in self-quarantine like other developed

nations are doing. Ramesh Nair, MD and CEO of JLL, said he created a designated place in his house as 'home office'. "I believe this is extremely essential for each one of us to do as we begin working from home. I have also shifted my Cisco DX80 from office to home that enables me to connect frequently with my leadership team via video conferencing," he said. "It is amazing how in the grind of our daily lives, we miss taking notice of the things that make our lives fuller and richer. As I work from home, I am also taking time to enjoy this greenery during the short breaks," he said.

Vikas Oberoi, CMD of Oberoi Realty, said the current crisis adversity is going to teach us a lot, especially how to work from home. "Working from home is extremely efficient as we waste a lot of time commuting and trying to meet each other face-to-face. All this is being avoided now because we have to keep this social distancing," Oberoi said. He said a lot work was getting down via FaceTime and without meeting face to face. "We have been Skyping a lot with our global consultants, who are based out of Singapore, the UK and the US. We are using a lot of this time to look inwards and see how we can do things better and faster," he said.

(With Shally Seth Mohile and Raghavendra Kamath)

IOC becomes 1st firm to begin supply of BS-VI fuel in country

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
New Delhi, 22 March

Indian Oil Corp (IOC), the nation's biggest oil firm, has begun the supply of the world's cleanest petrol and diesel across the country with all its 28,000 petrol pumps dispensing ultra-low sulphur fuel a good two weeks before the April 1 deadline.

"We have successfully rolled out the supply of BS-VI grade fuel across the country," IOC Chairman Sanjiv Singh said. "All our 28,000 petrol pumps across the country are dispensing BS-VI grade fuel for more than a week now." Other fuel retailers, Bharat Petroleum Corp Ltd (BPCL) and Hindustan Petroleum Corp Ltd (HPCL), are also progressively supplying BS-VI grade fuel and the entire country will switch to the cleanest fuel within this week.

The government had set April 1 as the deadline for starting supply of Euro-VI emission compliant fuels. With this India joins the select league of nations using petrol and diesel containing just 10 parts per million of sulphur in an attempt to cut vehicular emissions that are said to be one of the reasons for the choking pollution in major cities. "We have leapt from BS-IV (equivalent to Euro-VI grade fuel) straight to BS-VI in just three years," the IOC chairman said adding this is an achievement not seen in any large economies around the globe.

Singh, whose firm controls roughly half of the country's fuel market, said almost all the company's refineries began producing ultra-low sulphur BS-VI (equivalent to Euro-VI grade) petrol and diesel by the end of 2019 and thereafter the mammoth exercise was undertaken to replace every drop of fuel in the country with the new one.

Aramco says it'll focus on investments in markets with high growth like India

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
New Delhi, 22 March

The world's biggest oil exporter Saudi Aramco has said it is focusing its downstream investments in high-growth nations such as India as it negotiates a deal to buy up to 20 per cent stake in Reliance Industries' \$75 billion oil-to-chemical business.

In its latest annual report, Aramco said it is looking at investment opportunities in high-growth markets as well as nations that rely on importing crude oil. India is the world's fastest-growing energy market with fuel consumption rising at 4-5 per cent annually. It also relies on imports to meet its 83 per cent of oil needs. Saudi Arabia is its second-biggest oil supplier, exporting close to a fifth of India's oil sourced from abroad.

"Saudi Aramco is focusing its downstream investments in areas of high growth, including China, India and Southeast Asia, material demand centers such as the US, and countries that rely on importing crude oil, such as Japan and South Korea," the firm said in its annual report. Besides, the integration of the firm's upstream and downstream segments provides a unique opportunity for Saudi Aramco to secure crude oil demand by selling to refineries designed specifically to economically process Arabian crude oil. "Saudi Aramco intends to enhance its domestic and global marketing businesses to support the position of its upstream business in key, high-growth geographies, including China, India and Southeast Asia, which are integral to Saudi Aramco's existing business and future expansion strategy," it said adding the firm intends to maintain its presence in key large countries that rely on importing crude oil.

Mukesh Ambani had in August last year announced ini-



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tiel agreements to sell a 20 per cent stake in the oil-to-chemical business to the Saudi national oil company. Also, a 49 per cent interest in fuel retailing business was sold to the UK's BP plc for ₹7,000 crore.

Morgan Stanley in a March 19 research note stated that Aramco had in a conference call stated that it is still conducting due diligence on a potential investment in RIL's oil to chemicals operation. "Once evaluation is complete, it will move to the next stage of the approval process," it said.

Refining and petrochemicals are a cash cow for Reliance. As part of the August deal, Aramco will supply 500,000 barrels per day of crude (25 million tonnes per annum) on a long-term basis to Reliance's Jamnagar refinery complex (40 per cent of the refining capacity).

Market analyst firm Bernstein in a recent report had stated that Reliance's partnership with Aramco signals expansion rather than retreat as growth opportunities are expected to boost the petrochemical and refining vertical.

Brookfield may take over ₹1,500-cr Piramal loan to Bengaluru realtor

RAGHAVENDRA KAMATH
Mumbai, 22 March

In one of the largest among refinancing deals, Canada-based Brookfield Asset Management is in talks with Piramal Capital & Housing Finance to take over a loan given to Bengaluru-based Adarsh Developers, say sources. The debt is around \$200 million or ₹1,500 crore.

Significant because refinancing deals had almost stopped for non-banking financial companies after the IL&FS defaults in September 2018, leading to a liquidity crunch in the segment. "It is part of Piramal's strategy to reduce single borrower exposure and reduce the share of big-ticket loans in real estate," said the sources.

The terms of the proposed deal are not known. Brookfield declined to comment when asked. E-mails to Piramal did not elicit a response. B M



Jayeshankar, chairman of Adarsh Developers, said the deal was in the initial stages.

Brookfield is steadily building a credit portfolio in real estate. It has built a loan book of \$1 billion in the past couple of years. In 2017, it lent ₹800 crore to property developer Total

Environment of Bengaluru. In 2018, it invested \$100 million in a bunch of housing projects of Hyderabad-based INCOR.

Recently, it bought a 40 per cent stake in Indostar Capital Finance for ₹1,450 crore.

According to sources, Brookfield has also taken over some

loans of lender DHFL from Oaktree Capital. Brookfield bought a majority of US-based Oaktree last year. DHFL had sold some of its loans to Oaktree and was in the process of selling its wholesale book to the US-based investor. As mentioned earlier, Piramal Capital & Housing Finance has been reducing the share of wholesale real estate loans in its portfolio and single borrower exposure. At end-December 2019, the share of wholesale loans to real estate developers was 70 per cent.

Last year, it sold loans worth ₹2,000 crore, given to Lodha Developers (now Macrotech), to Goldman Sachs. Piramal is also in talks with other investors to sell its big-ticket loans, according to recent reports.

Last year, Adarsh raised money from JM Financial, Kotak Realty Fund, HDFC Property Fund and Piramal Capital to expand its portfolio.

Vedanta announces ₹100-cr fund to fight pandemic

Metals and mining giant Vedanta on Sunday announced setting up of a ₹100-crore fund to combat the coronavirus outbreak.

The fund will be utilised to provide preventive healthcare to daily wage workers, company employees and contract workers in and around various plants of the company, Vedanta said in a statement. "I commit ₹100 crore towards fighting the pandemic. We will increase the corpus if the need arises," Anil Agarwal, executive chairman, Vedanta Resources, said.

As part of other measures, Vedanta said the company will not cut salaries or fire any of its staff, including temporary workers during this crisis period. Besides, the company has also decided to provide a special one-time insurance to cover Vedanta's employees and their families against COVID-19.

Further, all mobile health vans in operational areas will aide in preventive healthcare and each business unit will contribute towards the livelihood of daily wage earners around plant locations like tea sellers and vegetable vendors.

The fund will cater to livelihood of daily wage workers, employees and contract workers, preventive health care and provide timely help to communities in and around various plant locations.

CORONAVIRUS IMPACT

Hoteliers want deferment of loans, GST holiday

JAYAJIT DASH
Bhubaneswar, 22 March

Fearing huge financial burden owing to cancellation of conferences as well as marriage and banquet bookings to stave off coronavirus (COVID-19) spread, the hotel industry has asked for deferment of bank loans and statutory dues. Besides, they have sought GST (goods and services tax) holiday till the besieged industry hits the revival route.

"Most of the hotel owners have taken loans from banks and in the current situation, it seems difficult for us to pay interest and bank EMIs (Equated Monthly Installments). Banks should be advised to consider the situation and cooperate with us and defer the EMIs and interest till the situation becomes normal. Also, CIBIL (Credit Information Bureau Ltd) score should not be affected in the current business environment. Similar measures have already been taken by countries like USA and China", J K Mohanty, co-chairman, Ficci tourism national council and chairman (eastern region), Indian Association of Tour Operators (IATO) wrote in a memorandum to Prime



Minister Narendra Modi. The hoteliers have also demanded to defer payment of statutory dues like advance tax payments and provident fund to employees, among others.

Such interventions from the central government will support the travel and hospitality industries in this moment of exigent crisis, they reasoned.

At the level of state governments, they have called for waiver of fees for upcoming licenses, permits or renewals such as municipality holding tax, bar license fee, ground

water fee and electricity fee till the travel and tourism industry recoups from the crisis precipitated by COVID-19 pandemic.

To facilitate the smooth recovery of hotel and travel businesses, Mohanty has advocated GST holiday for the next 12 months. He has also demanded immediate sanction of funds on the lines of Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) for employees engaged in tourism sector till revival happens.

The hoteliers have also demanded deferring payment of statutory dues like advance tax payments and provident fund to employees, among others

