

IN BRIEF

Trai recommends making STB interoperability mandatory

The Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (Trai) on Saturday recommended that all DTH and cable set-top-boxes (STBs) provided to the customers must support interoperability, and urged the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting to make it mandatory by introducing the requisite provisions. Interoperable STBs will allow consumers to change their DTH operator without buying a new set-top box. Presently the STBs deployed in the Cable TV networks are non-interoperable — the same STB cannot be used interchangeably across the different service providers. Trai also recommended the mandatory provisioning of USB port-based common interface for all digital television sets in India. **PTI**

Luxury home sales remain muted, shows report

Real estate developers have been able to sell only 45 per cent of luxury homes (priced above ₹3 crore) launched during the last three years, with investors still shying away from putting money in premium properties due to lower returns, according to PropTiger data. Housing brokerage firm PropTiger reported that only 5,926 luxury units have been sold till January this year, out of the 13,290 homes launched by developers across nine major cities during the last three calendar years. **PTI**

Production of cooking oil down 40%: Adani Wilmar

Adani Wilmar on Saturday said production of cooking oils has declined by 40 per cent due to labour shortage in the current lockdown, resulting in tight supplies of the essential commodity. Sales of cooking oils too have fallen 25 per cent with closure of all hotels, restaurants and cafeterias amid lockdown, said Anshu Mallick, deputy CEO of Adani Wilmar. **PTI**

Lupin contributes ₹21 cr for Covid-19 relief efforts

Pharma major Lupin on Saturday announced contribution of ₹21 crore for relief efforts directed towards mitigating the Covid-19 crisis. Lupin's employees have given their two days' salaries, together contributing a sum of ₹5.5 crore to the PM CARES Fund, the company said. **PTI**

Fino Payments Bank logs 80% fall in local remittances

Fino Payments Bank said it had seen an 80 per cent decline in domestic remittances volume as migrant workers returned to their homes following closure of small businesses due to the nationwide lockdown. The payments bank sees average monthly remittances of close to ₹5,000 crore from daily wage earners. **PTI**

Flipkart, Tata team up to deliver essentials

Distributors of Tata group firms will list on Flipkart as marketplace sellers

PEERZADA ABRAR
Bengaluru, 11 April

E-commerce firm Flipkart joined hands with Tata Consumer Products to provide its customers access to essential food and beverage products, in the wake of the coronavirus disease (Covid-19) outbreak.

As a part of this, distributors of the Tata group companies will list themselves on Flipkart as marketplace sellers. Consumers can use the Flipkart to buy different combo packs of essential products such as beverages (Tata Tea and Coffee) and foods (Tata Sampann spices, pulses, and nutri mixes) offered by Tata Consumer Products.

"The synergies and capabilities of both Tata Consumer and Flipkart are complementary and we are proud to enable an alternative business channel built on our marketplace model to deliver great value to consumers in these times of crisis," said Kalyan Krishnamurthy, chief executive officer of Flipkart Group.

"Tata Consumer Products is committed to ensuring the availability of our beverage and food brands to consumers across India, during this difficult time. This partnership with Flipkart provides an innovative way to set up a strong alternative distribution channel through our wide network," said Sunil D'Souza, managing director and chief executive officer, Tata Consumer Products.

Flipkart's marketplace supply chain will fulfil the orders by picking up these combinations from Tata



THE PARTNERSHIPS

- Consumers can buy combo packs such as Tata Tea and Coffee and Tata Sampann spices, pulses, and nutri mixes
- The partnership is already operational in Bengaluru and will be expanded to Mumbai, Delhi and tier-2 cities
- Flipkart's marketplace supply chain will fulfil the orders by picking up these combinations from Tata Consumer's distributors
- Flipkart had also announced a pilot programme with Spencers to introduce hyperlocal deliveries of groceries and essentials in Hyderabad
- Earlier, BigBasket partnered with Uber to help in delivery of essential items

Consumer's distributors and delivering those to customers using its network of delivery executives. The partnership is already operational in Bengaluru, and the companies plan to expand these facilities in Mumbai and Delhi in the coming week and tier-2 cities in the future.



CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC

This week, Flipkart also announced a pilot programme with retail chain Spencers to introduce hyperlocal deliveries of groceries and essentials in Hyderabad.

Tata Consumer Products, part of Tata group, was formed in February this year following the merger of Tata Global Beverages and the consumer products business of Tata Chemicals.

E-commerce companies have been exploring unique models to ensure business continuity amid the

21-day nationwide lockdown imposed by the government to contain the spread of Covid-19.

Earlier, BigBasket partnered with Uber to help in delivery of essential items, while Grofers said it had hired about 2,000 people from industries that have been deeply impacted by the current crisis.

E-commerce companies have struggled to deliver orders after the lockdown was imposed on March 24. Even though the government allowed delivery of essential goods including food, pharmaceuticals and medical equipment through e-commerce platforms, players faced hiccups initially.

The surge in orders also disrupted operations for these companies. Players have now started resuming operations across various cities, clearing pending orders before accepting new ones.

With additional inputs from PTI

Bengal Chemicals restarts producing HCQ after decades

AVISHEK RAKSHIT
Kolkata, 11 April

Bengal Chemicals & Pharmaceuticals (BCPL), India's oldest pharmaceuticals company, is back in the spotlight because of surging demand for hydroxychloroquine (HCQ), the most sought-after drug in the treatment of Covid-19.

Founded in 1892, BCPL, which once used to manufacture HCQ, ceased to produce the anti-malarial drug decades ago because of cash constraints and labour issues.

The company has once again obtained a license from the Directorate of Drugs Control, West Bengal, to begin manufacturing of the drug that US President Donald Trump has touted as a game-changer in the fight against Covid-19.

However, BCPL — the only central public sector enterprise (CPSE) that can manufacture HCQ and other anti-malarial drugs — is now facing a shortage of raw materials.

The company, which has been scouting for raw materials since as early as March 20, hasn't been able to procure any yet. "There hasn't been any success in procuring raw materials, and this is the major constraint which can affect production of HCQ. Besides, we are a small company and our resources on this front are limited," said P M Chandraiah, managing director (additional charge) and director (finance), BCPL.

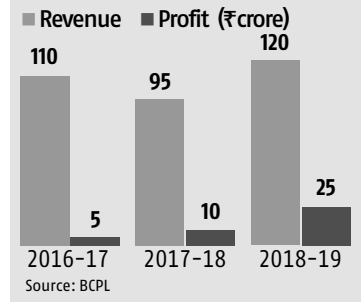
"Imagine a situation when the demand for a certain tablet spikes from 1 million to 100 million suddenly. Will a company be able to cater to the demand if the necessary ecosystem is not there," he added.

BCPL also has licence manufacture chloroquine phosphate — another anti-malarial drug which is also being used to treat Covid-19.

The base formulation for both of these drugs is based on extracts from the bark of the cinchona plant and



BALANCE SHEET



some other synthetic chemicals.

Importantly, BCPL has exhausted all the raw material it previously had to manufacture chloroquine phosphate and is now awaiting raw material supply. "We had orders for 2 million tablets from 15-16 state governments. We have been able to make around 800,000 tablets and will need more raw materials to produce more," he said.

With the current production capacity, BCPL can manufacture 1 million HCQ and chloroquine phosphate tablets every day.

Chandraiah said given BCPL's operational and manpower constraints, it would be helpful if the local administration can help the firm procure raw materials.

The West Bengal government has stepped in to arrange for raw materials for pharmaceutical companies to make HCQ, and has asked the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) to submit a report on the feasibility of restarting operations at cinchona plantations in Mongpu in Kurseong district. This plantation, which is spread over 9,600 acres, has been closed for over 15 years now.

IT earnings season starts with Wipro on April 15

DEBASIS MOHAPATRA
Bengaluru, 11 April

IT services major Wipro will kick-start earnings season for the IT industry next week. This had so far been done by its larger peers — Tata Consultancy Services (TCS) and Infosys.

While Wipro will announce its fourth quarter (Q4) results along with annual financial statements on April 15, market leader TCS will hold its board meet the next day (April 16) for approval of its financial statements. Infosys is yet to inform investors the date it will announce its Q4 earnings.

Though making Q4 results public before its competitors doesn't hold much significance, sources said Wipro is likely to announce the name of its new chief executive officer (CEO) after the resignation of Abidali Neemuchwala. In the first week of February, Neemuchwala had resigned from the firm, citing family commitments. "Amid the ongoing Covid-19 crisis, it is important to have a clear leadership roadmap. So, it is likely that Wipro will announce its

WHAT TO EXPECT



The firm is likely to announce the name of new CEO after the resignation of ABIDALI NEEMUCHWALA

new CEO's name with the results," said an IT outsourcing advisor who is familiar with the development.

Names of Bhaskar Ghosh, group CEO of Accenture; former Accenture executive Omar Abobsh; and Ravi Kumar S, deputy COO and president at Infosys, are being floated as the likely successor of Neemuchwala.

Most domestic IT biggies are likely to post revenue and profit growth in their guided range despite Covid-19

While TCS will announce Q4 earnings on Apr 16, Infosys is yet to announce a date

Most IT firms likely to post revenue and profit growth in their guided range despite Covid-19 crisis

Many may refrain from giving guidance for FY21 due to uncertain business environment

impacting their business operations adversely in March.

"Wipro's revenue was expected to improve across business segments, barring health and care. But that view now needs to be recalibrated in the aftermath of Covid-19," ICICI Securities has said in a recent note. "The firm will see obvious impacts of Covid-19 on growth in FY21, given its higher exposure than peers to segments like oil & gas and regions like the Middle East," it said.

Donations to CM fund won't qualify as CSR, says MCA

RUCHIKA CHITRAVANSHI
New Delhi, 11 April

Companies can't claim contributions made to the Chief Minister's Relief Fund or the State Relief Fund for Covid-19 as corporate social responsibility (CSR) spending, the Ministry of Corporate Affairs (MCA) has said.

These funds are not part of the Schedule VII of the Act that enumerates eligible funds under CSR, it said.

Also, payments made to temporary and daily wage workers during the lockdown period would not be counted as CSR as such payments are a part of "moral, humanitarian and contractual obligations of the company", the MCA said.

It said any ex-gratia payment made to daily wage earners specifically for the purpose of fighting Covid-19 over and above the disburse-

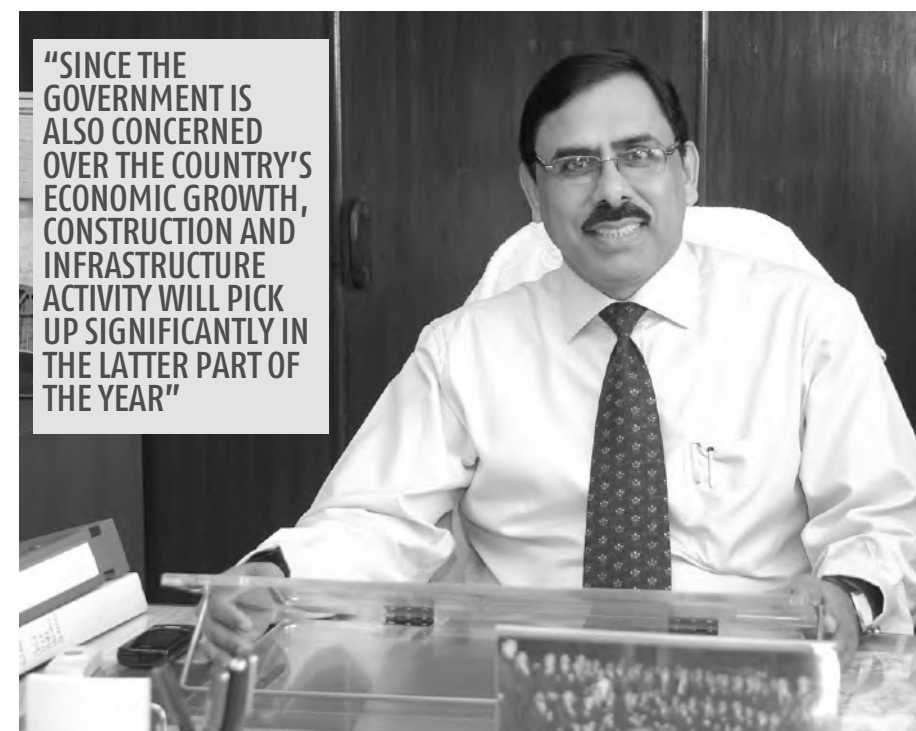
ment of wages would be allowed as CSR expenditure as a one-time exception. This, provided there is an explicit declaration to that effect by the board, duly certified by the statutory auditor.

On March 28, the government had announced PM CARES Fund to deal with the Covid-19 pandemic and any other such emergencies that may arise in future. The fund was declared an eligible activity under CSR of companies.

The schedule VII provides for setting up a fund by the central government for socio-economic development and relief which would be counted as CSR expenditure, an MCA notification said.

On March 23, the government had said contributions towards fighting the coronavirus pandemic will be treated as CSR activity.

'We foresee strong steel demand post-Covid'



With the coronavirus disease (Covid-19) pandemic disrupting domestic steel demand, ANIL KUMAR CHAUDHARY, chairman, Steel Authority of India (SAIL), has chalked out a strong business continuity plan to combat its impact. In a telephonic interview with Aditi Divekar, Chaudhary talks about lessons learnt from the crisis, and the demand outlook for steel in FY21. Edited excerpts:

SAIL has lowered production due to the pandemic, which has hit steel demand. What are the steps being taken to have a strong business continuity plan for FY21?

Firstly, we will be rationalising steel production according to the market demand. For this, blast furnaces — which are more productive and cost effective on techno-economic parameters — would be kept active, while others will remain in standby mode. Secondly, with the help of our unions, we are keeping contract as well as regular labourers on the supportive side. They have assured that if extra work needs to be done once the situation normalises, the workforce will be forthcoming. Thirdly, our officials are in touch with end-users, including dealers and distributors, trying to ascertain the demand size of the market after the lockdown.

How do you see the domestic steel demand in FY21, keeping in mind the uncertainty over when the crisis would take a breather?

I am foreseeing strong demand for steel once the coronavirus impact declines over the next few months. Even if we do not see strong demand immediately, or in the first few months of the fiscal, it may gradually pick up and, in fact, make up for the loss in the balance part of the year. Since the government is also concerned over the country's economic growth, construction and infrastructure activity will pick up signifi-

cantly in the latter part of the year.

The pandemic has led to several issues pertaining to domestic logistics and the supply-chain segment. What are SAIL's learnings?

Our decision to rely on railways, and not roadways, to transport both raw material as well as finished products is bearing fruit. About 85 per cent of our material moves through railways. We did not face any shortage of material despite the lockdown. There is only labour shortage at the contractor's end to unload material, but this situation is not specific to SAIL.

SAIL continues to have a high labour cost when compared to its peers. Have you changed your hiring strategy? How are you handling the employee cost parameter?

Our effort to maximise production and reduce labour cost per tonne is something which will continue. Apart from this, though 7-8 per cent of our workforce retires annually, SAIL is doing only 2 percent fresh hiring against this. This is ensuring cautious hiring. Also, we are looking at bringing down the average employee age in the company to 42 years, from the current 46 years. This would take about 2-3 years.

SAIL has enjoyed monopoly when it came to bagging orders from the Railways. Lately, Jindal Steel & Power has been bagging a few orders as well. What is SAIL doing to keep its market share intact?

About 12 per cent of SAIL's turnover comes from the Railways. There is no question of competition with Jindal Steel as we are complementing each other. The Railways are going to other suppliers only after having exhausted their requirements from SAIL. So, to that extent, there is no threat to our market share.

Co-living firms open doors to health care staff

Some also rent out their premises to IT firms' employees

SAMREEN AHMAD
Bengaluru, 11 April

Saurabh Chittora, who's treating coronavirus disease (Covid-19) patients at a government medical college in Kota, Rajasthan, gets done with his afternoon shift by 5.30 pm. The medical practitioner then leaves for his new temporary home where he takes the first proper meal of the day, having skipped lunch.

"I am supervising the health of 134 Covid-19 patients and have a family with parents who are over 65 years of age. I don't want to expose them to any health risk. Both my children are also below 5 years. So I have moved to a co-living space for now," says Chittora, who hasn't met his family for 10 days despite being in the same city.

Chittora is staying at one of the Hello World co-living spaces in Kota, which has given out two of its properties — one for health care professionals and another for migrants who have been stranded in the city because of the 21-day nationwide lockdown.

"We have opened five of our



properties in Kota, Jaipur, and NCR for health care professionals, who are on the frontline serving Covid-19 patients, and people who are stranded because of the lockdown," says Jitendra Jagadev, founder of Hello World, a co-living venture of Tiger Global-backed home rental network NestAway.

The company has so far rolled out 150 beds for doctors, nurses, and ward boys in these properties. In order to facilitate the health professionals' food at any time during the day, the start-up has also

provided 24x7 housekeeping. "In total, we will roll out 500 beds in the first phase during this month in cities including Mumbai and Bengaluru," says Jagadev.

Hello World is also in talks with schools to convert those into temporary homes for migrant labourers. "We will run our services for free for up to three months... we will be looking at raising external funds," says Jagadev.

Another co-living start-up Guesture has also been in talks with multi-specialty hospital Narayana

Health to open up its vacant properties for health workers. However, the hospital chain has so far not sought a requirement for such a space.

"The construction workers that are stuck at sites during the lockdown are staying safe at the quarters provided by the firm. Shanders, the parent company of Guesture, is taking care of their other needs such as food and medical support," says Sriram Chitturi, founder, Guesture.

The start-up has also tied up with Tech Mahindra to provide its facilities to employees who do not have any means to work from home. "We have cordoned off an entire property with 100 beds along with work desk, Wi-Fi connectivity, housekeeping, and food for those employees who did not have work-from-home facilities," says Chitturi.

In a similar tie-up, Nexus Venture Partners-backed co-living platform Zolostays has also rented 400 beds in Chennai and Hyderabad to Cognizant and Capgemini for employees who were struggling to work from home. "We are charging any-where between ₹7,000 and ₹10,000 per bed per month which are the standard Zolostays charges including food, Wi-Fi, DTH connection, and housekeeping," says Nikhil Sikri, cofounder and CEO, Zolostays.