

Going global, Indian firms create jobs in US

Indian firms are not just taking up outsourcing any more, but have in fact invested a whopping \$6 billion in the United States and created 40,000 jobs with quite a few of them going to the Americans.

If a Janaki posing as Janet at call centres in India has been servicing customers in the US, many a Jane and John employed by India Inc. in the US is now helping travellers worldwide book a flight or send flowers and gifts to loved ones in America.

A group of 34 Indian companies represented in the India Business Forum (IBF), launched in June 2006, structured at the initiative of the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII), has made investments in such diverse sectors as technology, pharmaceuticals, manufacturing and gems and jewellery.

The Indian companies with 40,000 employees have invested about \$6 billion in the US this year alone through acquisitions and mergers. While there are more Indian nationals in the service sector, the number of local employees goes as high as 95 percent in the manufacturing sector.

'Indian companies are no longer just Indian. They are as much global as any other,' says Kiran Pasricha, the CII deputy director general based in Washington. Besides the US, CII has set up similar forums in Singapore and South Africa with one in the process of being launched in China.

The Tata Group alone has invested over \$2 billion in the last couple of years through acquisitions and mergers in the US with 16 of its companies from hotels to manufacturing employing 16,000 people, about 5,000 of them local.

'With very few exceptions, our hires of local employees are on the basis of their skill sets, not on their knowledge of India or international experience,' says David Good, chief representative of the group for North America and the American chair of IBF.

'After all, a coffee producer needs experts in coffee, not India specialists,' quipped Good, a former American diplomat with a long association with India from his last job there as consul general in Mumbai.

The local American employees work in all Tata companies, but heavy concentrations are in the hotels, manufacturing, telecommunications, engineering and software and in beverages besides two call centres in Ohio and Florida.

The Tatas have hotels in New York, Boston and San Francisco, produce Eight O'Clock Coffee, Tetley Tea and Good Earth Tea and have Corus Steel production units in Ohio and Pennsylvania.

The group provides engineering and software services through Tata Consultancy Services (TCS) and INCAT/Tata Technologies with TCS earning 53 percent of its \$4.3 billion revenue from the US. And in telecommunications, VSNL, a 74 percent Tata owned company, emerging as the largest voice provider in the US offering competition to the likes of AT and amp;T and Verizon.

Tatas' call centre business, SerWiz Solutions Limited, has 250 full-time employees at its Milton, Florida, centre and 260 such employees at Reno, Ohio. 'Both centres are currently in a hiring mode,' says Ricardo Layun, vice president, Customer Care Operations.

At the moment, the two call centres support one of the world's leading online travel companies, a large US airline carrier, and the American region of a large Asian airline carrier, large domestic and international airlines. They also seasonally support a leading telephone and online retailer of flowers and gift sales.

The Tatas have been expanding these call centres since acquiring them in April 2006 as 'we have found that the US communities in which we operate provide a strong workforce, competitive economic conditions, and positive growth potential,' said Layun.

Both call centres operate 24/7, but 'We have not experienced an issue with staffing after hours. We have found that offering these night shifts provides employees opportunities to attend day-time college courses or avoid day-care costs,' he said.

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