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TAKING CHARGE

GM Summit's Bengaluru edition witnessed the congregation of some of India's hotel owners, operators, area heads, general managers, and key decision makers delve into some highly pertinent topics that have a direct bearing on the hospitality business

As part of its initiatives to highlight dynamic leaders and companies and share their insights, which can benefit their peers, the Bengaluru edition of GM Summit by Hotelier India, saw a fruitful discussion on highly pertinent topics that directly impact the hospitality business. The Summit was hosted in collaboration with partners: BMW, Maggi, Jaguar and Hafele.

CHANGING VISTAS

The first panel that debated the topic 'Shifting tides of recovery' was moderated by Vikramjit Singh, President, Lemon Tree Hotels. Speaking about how COVID has changed the industry, Vinay Gupta from ibis & ibis Styles India said, "There has been a real transformation in the industry and has brought more opportunities. Anyone who survived this is better prepared and more resolute. It is important to hold on to our lessons in this period." Ali added, "The biggest learning was people realising the importance of grace under pressure. We learnt how to cope with the situation by being



able to recover sooner as the COVID waves progressed." Interestingly, the hospitality business has picked up close to and above pre-COVID levels in many cases, and learnings around health and cleanliness will help the industry in the long run, avers Puri.

POST-PANDEMIC CUES

As hotels move forward after the pandemic and being one of the industries that bore the brunt, hoteliers are ensuring the lessons learnt are not forgotten. Sabharwal, says, "It is important that we make sure the investment is right for the location and the product. Listen to the brand. We need to design and build

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people-centric hotels, keeping safety in mind. Thereby making it not just a great property, but also a secure workplace."

The industry is also finding efficiencies in every aspect of operations that are becoming the new norms in the post-pandemic era. Malakar avers, "Whether it is payrolls, digital check-ins, safety and more, this is a great way to introduce people to light human touch opportunities and see how we can drive productivity. Customers are now used to these tools, and the benefits of technology can help hotels." Another aspect that the pandemic has reinforced is health and wellness. Also, the need for social interaction ensures that people return to hotels.

PEOPLE MATTER

Manpower ratios have changed in ho-

PANEL 1: SHIFTING TIDES OF RECOVERY

- Javed Ali, Senior Regional Director Operations, South Asia, Radisson Hotel Group
- Ranjan Malakar, Regional Director of Operations – India, Hilton
- Lokesh Sabharwal, Regional Vice President – Operations, India & South West Asia, Hyatt
- Sharad Puri, Cluster General Manager, Sheraton Grand Bengaluru, Whitefield, Aloft Bengaluru Cessna Park at Marriott International
- Vinay Gupta, Director of Operations, ibis & ibis Styles India
- Vikramjit Singh, President, Lemon Tree Hotels



Panel 1 speakers – Shifting tides of recovery: (L to R) Vikramjit Singh, Ranjan Malakar, Sharad Puri, Lokesh Sabharwal, Javed Ali and Vinay Gupta.

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tels, and Puri says hotels need to start charging a fair price to their guests. Ali agrees, "We could redeploy staff in new hotels and invest in upkeep and maintenance. Leadership should go the extra mile to allow flexibility and downtime. Work-life balance, charismatic leadership, and looking after people in times of adversity are aspects that will matter when attracting talent."

Cross-functional working is another aspect that is here to stay, Sabharwal says, "Staffing ratios we saw through COVID are not here to stay, but rather we need to rationalise where staff is required. We surely need guest-facing staff but probably not as many heads of departments. We need to go back to basics and focus on training, skill development and how we onboard new staff." Today dimensions of training are also changing and Puri admits that a lot of hard work is required to get people back into the industry. Malakar acknowledges that working hours in the hospitality space have al-



1 Bibhor Srivastava, MD, ITP Media India delivering the welcome address.

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ways put people off from hospitality. "Work from home and flexible hours in other industries means we need to think of hybrid setups in some of our roles." Cross training, charging a premium for labour-intensive roles and leveraging technology is being seen as parameters by which companies can enhance manpower.

TAKING CHARGE

Gourav Vyas, Head of Corporates Sales & Used Cars, BMW India, one of the partners of the Summit, admitted that other industries need to learn about customer experience from hospitality. Celebrating the 15th anniversary of BMW in India, the company has delivered one lakh cars across the country. "We can harness our ecosystem together as we have a common customer base. We hope to be a carbon-neutral company and see this partnership forging ahead."

The next session, moderated by Mandeep Lamba, President (South Asia), HVS ANAROCK, titled 'Taking Charge' had panellists like Aditya Raheja, Director, GSTAAD Hotels, JB



2 Gourav Vyas, Head of Corporates Sales & Used Cars, BMW India, in his presentation at the Summit, admitted that other industries need to learn about customer experience from hospitality.

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➤ Speaker of the second panel discussion: (L to R) Mandeep Lamba, Zubin Saxena, Nirupa Shankar, Aditya Raheja, JB Singh and Vikram Cotah.

PANEL 2: TAKING CHARGE

- **Mandeep Lamba**, President (South Asia), HVS ANAROCK
- **Aditya Raheja**, Director, GSTAAD Hotels
- **JB Singh**, President & CEO, InterGlobe Hotels
- **Nirupa Shankar**, Director, Brigade Hospitality
- **Vikram Cotah**, CEO, GRT Hotels
- **Zubin Saxena**, Managing Director and VP Operations, South Asia, Radisson Hotel Group

Singh, President & CEO, InterGlobe Hotels, Nirupa Shankar, Director, Brigade Hospitality, Vikram Cotah, CEO, GRT Hotels and Zubin Saxena, Managing Director and VP Operations, South Asia, Radisson Hotel Group.

DISRUPTION DIARIES

The pandemic has taught the industry many lessons that have resulted in some key takeaways for its stakeholders. While Saxena admitted that variable costs in the industry were more variable than one thought, Shankar said that COVID taught the team how to be creative under constraints. For Raheja, the biggest takeaway was the importance of communication with customers and vendors. Singh opined that the industry must use this as an opportunity to reset itself, while Cotah said managing cash flows was an important learning lesson. Shankar explains, "Being financially conservative and having a diversification of assets as well as thinking outside the box will help the industry."

Raheja added, "We are much more flexible and have financial



➤ Bibhor Srivastava felicitating one of the partners at the summit, Amantran Ghosh, Head Marketing, Nestle India.

prudence as the way forward." While Singh said, "The importance of identifying a core strength and focus on high impact areas is vital." Cotah added, "Owners take cognisance of employee talent base as assets and focus on attracting, retaining and engaging talent." As business cycles correct themselves once every seven years, Saxena said, "We must continue unlocking economies of scale and channelise it." ■