

EXCLUSIVE

Dattatri Salagame: 'Nearly every software from Bosch has a footprint of India or RBEI in it.'

In his first media interview after taking charge as the **CEO and President of Robert Bosch Engineering and Business Solutions (RBEI)**, **Dattatri Salagame** speaks on his top priorities, impact of Covid-19, how India plays a major role for the company, partnering educational institutes to train young engineering talent and lots more. An interview by **Nilesh Wadhwa**.

What were your initial thoughts on being appointed President and CEO of RBEI?

I assumed this position in the middle of the Covid crisis. We have to do business in ways we are not used to. New rules, and a new drawing board... it is an enormous opportunity and responsibility.

What are the top priorities in your new role?

The Covid situation has thrown a challenge to most companies. I would like to first focus on making RBEI a company that is 'Fit for the Future', with focus on competence, excellence and innovation.

At RBEI, we work on some really cool technologies that are 'Invented for Life'. My next objective is to ensure we are not only seen as an engineering powerhouse but also as a cool company that builds technologies that help us in our daily lives. We want our offices in India, Mexico, Vietnam, Poland and China to enable

seamless delivery around the world to our customers.

How do you view the global and Indian automotive industries' reaction to tackling the Covid-19 impact?

Covid-19 has an unprecedented impact on global economies and trade. It has taken down fundamental ecosystems across industries including automotive. Companies across the world have cut down on spending. Nowadays, cars have more software than ever before and looking at the current situation, India's information technology sector that supports auto companies worldwide will be under pressure.

How is RBEI responding and contributing towards fighting the pandemic?

Our employees are our top priority. We have introduced a number of initiatives like virtual connect sessions, doctors on call, counselling helplines, fitness and meditation sessions.



In addition, we have introduced learning and upskilling series for our employees to pick up new skills, improve their competencies.

Our business continuity planning (BCP) is active and we are able to provide high quality, uninterrupted

services to our customers. We also have some cool technology solutions that have been deployed on campus to ensure there is social distancing and better utilisation of resources. Working from home continues.

Bosch in India has

donated Rs 5 crore to the PM CARES Fund and pledged an additional Rs 45 crore for various community welfare initiatives.

India is known for its low-cost, high-quality innovation practices and also established itself as an engineering powerhouse. How does RBEI leverage this?

RBEI is the largest engineering centre for Bosch worldwide outside Germany. Nearly every software from Bosch has a footprint of India or RBEI in it. RBEI offers a unique combination of competencies - sensors, software, and services. It stems from our Bosch pedigree, and the capability and expertise we have built up over the years. This pedigree, coupled along with agility and innovative young engineers from RBEI, makes our offering to customers very strong. Through RBEI's program for start-ups - DNA (Discover, Nurture, Align) - we are looking at innovation from an outside-in perspective and we are always looking at ways to collaborate with new technologies and enterprising engineers.

Can you share some interesting projects and developments executed by RBEI?

We are at the forefront of designing, developing, and executing IoT ecosystems through our all encompassing capability in sensors, software, and services. For the past three years, we have won the Consumer Electronics Show's 'CES Honoree' award for products that were completely engineered out of RBEI's office; each of them were in different domains.

- Climo (won in 2018), Category: Smart City - Air Quality Monitoring
- Phantom (won in 2019), Category: Tech for better

world - Energy monitoring ● Vivascope (won in 2020), Category: Tech for better world - Smart Diagnostics

As we speak, we continue to work on products in the domains of healthcare, automotive and new technologies like AI and Blockchain. Working on connected products is going to be the order of the day.

What is the company innovating in terms of sustainable mobility solutions?

Sustainable mobility remains a challenge and a huge opportunity for our industry. Global demand for mobility of people and goods is constantly rising. Mobility needs to remain affordable, convenient and exciting. The major facets include personalised, automated, connected, and electrified. At RBEI, we work on making all these four dimensions come alive with software.

Is e-mobility the last word according to you?

Mobility is not just about electrified. Bosch looks at it as personalised, automated, and connected, and electrified, PACE for short. In fact, if you see announcements by Bosch on media, Bosch is working on other parallel technologies apart from electric to ensure sustainability.

How much does the India R&D contribute towards your global projects?

As I mentioned earlier, there is always a bit of RBEI in most of Bosch products worldwide. RBEI engineers are supporting counterparts in Germany, US and Japan. We have development centres in India, Vietnam and Mexico and project teams across the world collaborating for a common goal.

Can you share your thoughts on Indo-German partnership?

RBEI, which is the largest engineering centre for Bosch worldwide outside Germany, has unique competencies in sensors, software, and services.

RBEI has been winning the Consumer Electronics Show's 'CES Honoree' regularly. In 2019, 'Phantom' won in the 'Energy Monitoring'; in 2020, Vivascope won for 'Smart Diagnostics'.



Bosch has had a longstanding and deep relationship with India, since Bosch set up its manufacturing operation in 1951. We were also one of the forerunners in establishing a development centre in 1997 (RBEI). Today, we are one of the largest engineering R&D centres in India with over 20,000 engineers.

RBEI is actively engaged with a number of educational institutes in the country. What is the over-arching goal here?

We want to bridge the disconnect between academia and workplace. Our partnerships with educational institutes across the country are aimed at giving a significant boost to the employability of engineering students. We want to be able to offer young engineers the opportunity to work with the best technologies and with a top global brand like Bosch. This is possible when industry and institutes collaborate to better prepare our engineers for the technological challenges they will have to solve when they enter the workplace.

We have been engaged in shaping the curriculum. Investment from Bosch is not just in infrastructure at educational institutions like labs, but we have technology experts from Bosch who are mentoring and guiding the students.

We also continue to invest in some key initiatives, for instance with IIT Madras for AI and IISC for cyber physical systems.

Last year, Mr Vijay Ratnaparkhe, former president and MD, RBEI was elevated as CIO at Robert Bosch. What, according to you, are the leadership qualities that top Indian executives bring to the role?

Yes, Vijay and leaders like him show the competence India has in leading in the global scenario. As geographical boundaries are blurring, we are looking at truly global leaders.

What advice you would like to share with people in the automotive and other industries?

We live in a connected world; our actions influence everyone else. Sustainability needs to be at the core of our beliefs and actions. ■

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