

Obama talks business with industry heads

NOV 6TH

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MUMBAI: It was not just the Tatas and Ambanis who got to meet the US president, Barack Obama. The US prez had a tete-a-tete with a chosen few entrepreneurs with innovative models as part of a roundtable at the Trident Hotel. From Irfan Alam, the man who helps rickshaw pullers, to Chetan Sinha, founder of Mann Deshi Bank, a microfinance bank that lends, funds and teaches entrepreneurial skills to rural women, Obama lent his keen ear to understand how their business models ticked.

Sammaan is an organization that works with cycle rickshaw pullers in parts of northern and eastern India. "The rickshaw pullers rent a vehicle and we arrange finances for them. We also enable them to use their vehicles for advertisements," Alam told TOI.

Obama, said Alam, was impressed that Sammaan was the world's largest organization with 5 lakh illiterate and unskilled members. Alam, who has also set up a Sammaan Foundation in the US, and wants Obama to be its honorary chairman, said, "The president took my file and said he would look into it."

Similarly, Siraj Ubdil Qureshi's company works on livestock development by providing healthcare services for animals. "There are 1.30 lakh people registered with the organization and we offer services to 7 lakh animals in Uttar Pradesh," said Qureshi, who also assists people in converting animal waste into power.

"We had gone to the White House in April for the entrepreneurial summit, where entrepreneurs from all over the world were invited. There were five people from India. I was among them," said Qureshi.

Another entrepreneur, Anant Kumar's LifeSpring Hospitals is a chain of maternity hospitals for the lower-income group in Hyderabad and other parts of Andhra Pradesh.

Also part of the entrepreneurs meet, were Anand Mahindra, vice chairman and managing director, Mahindra & Mahindra and **Stuart E Marwell, president & CEO, Curtis Instruments, a New York based world leader in advanced electric vehicle technology control systems.**

Marwell and Mahindra represented the 15-year relationship between the Reva Car Corporation, the electric car company, and **Curtis Instruments**, a global technology leader in electric vehicle technologies.

Mahindra shared perspective on how future of collaboration between India and the US, and the advancement of beneficial technologies, such as electric cars, will benefit from US expertise in developing templates and business models, including new transportation models.

Ajay Piramal of Piramal Corp, who was also present, said, "We had a very engaging discussion on how high technology from US and collaboration with India can create a world-class product, and not only low-cost product."

Shahnaz Husain, CEO, Husain Herbals, said she was upset with Obama's dipping popularity in the US. "Give the man a chance. We should be grateful that such a man walks on the earth," said Husain, who also took Obama's autograph on 'The Bridge', a book on the life and rise of the US president.