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## Firm expects 'tough decisions' in PM speech • [18+] now in work-from-home mode • Dua opts for other measures

India's BigLaw is taking Corona seriously...

⚡ **Breaking**

By Legally India • Monday, 16 March 2020 12:23 • Law firms An estimated 8 minute read...

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**F**rom today, nearly all of [Khaiatan & Co](#) lawyers and support staff will officially have the option of working from home, in a bid to reduce the risk of spreading the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) amongst its workforce.

**Update 12:45:** [J Sagar Associates \(JSA\)](#) has also issued a notice to its staff today that all of the firm's offices will be closed from tomorrow, 17 March until further notice (unless an equity partner requires office access for themselves or a team for "as short a duration as possible"). JSA Mumbai-based senior partner Dina Wadia said that last week the Mumbai office had put into place measures to test remote working, with it having been instituted properly now for the next two weeks. See JSA's internal



**Update 14:25:** [Trilegal](#) has also instituted a work-from-home policy for lawyers from today, according to [Bar & Bench](#)<sup>↗</sup>, with "Shardul Amarchand Mangaldas & Co is too getting ready to move in this direction and allow all of its employees to work from home. Cyril Amarchand Mangaldas and L&L Partners are also working in this direction".

**Update 14:30:** [Veritas Legal](#) confirmed that it too would be on a "work from home model from tomorrow.

**Update 17:12:** [Cyril Amarchand Mangaldas](#) managing partner Cyril Shroff confirmed: "We moved to WFH [working form home] from tomorrow. Everyone from tomorrow will work remotely except essential services."

**Update 17:23:** [Phoenix Legal](#) is also going to be working from home tomorrow. The office would only be visited for "urgent matters" said a spokesperson.

**Update 19:47:** [IndusLaw](#) has encouraged that all fee-earners work from home tomorrow onwards. The majority would be taking up the option, though the litigation team might need to be present for matters that have been listed and thereafter continue to work from home. All offices would remain open with limited staff, said partner Gaurav Dani.

**Update 20:06:** [AZB & Partners](#) will also be implementing work-from-home in both offices. Mumbai managing partner Zia Mody said: "We have decided to work from home from Delhi from tomorrow, and Mumbai the day after." Only skeleton staff would be in each office.

**Update 20:41:** [Lakshmikumaran & Sridharan \(LKS\)](#) will be closing its offices from tomorrow. Partner Badri Narayan commented: "All of our offices will be closed with our professionals and staff working from home."

**Update 17 March, 00:25:** S&R Associates will be rolling out a work-from-home (WFH) scheme from today (Tuesday), we have learned from a firm source. S&R has apparently been stress testing its IT and is now ready to roll to start with WFH, subject to some essential admin or IT staff remaining in the office for now to keep things running.

**Update 00:25:** The city of Mumbai, meanwhile, has ordered all private businesses to only work at 50% headcount capacity, or be booked for disobeying the order of a public servant under the IPC's section 188, according to the [ET](#).

**Update 17 March 2020:** The following firms have also announced working from home plans:

- [Economic Laws Practice \(ELP\)](#): "We would like to inform you that in light of the COVID -19 situation and in the interest and safety of our colleagues, Economic Laws Practice has instituted a work from home policy effective March 18, 2020."
- [Pioneer Legal](#) partner Pritha Jha: "Pioneer Legal is committed not only to its staff and clients, but to the people at large. We do not wish to endanger or expose others through ourselves. The time to act is now, before the the virus is beyond control. We already have WFH policies in place and therefore for us, a complete



unprecedented events. We hope others will follow suit and act not just in their own, but for everyone else's best interest."

- [Dhaval Vussonji & Associates](#) managing partner Prachi Dave: "At Dhaval Vussonji & Associates we have been forward looking and over the last couple of years, we developed technology to suit our needs to store data and make documents available in an online format. We have members working from 4 different locations within Mumbai, so we built cutting edge technology to support our productivity and billing cycles. Our existing model has allowed us to seamlessly transition our entire work force into a remote working plan and ensure business continuity for our clients. Prevention is better than cure, especially where the cure is quite unknown, we decided to announce this policy last week."

**Update 17 March, 18:02:** A [Dua Associates](#) spokesperson has shared the following internal email with us regarding the firm's measures:

It is undoubtedly an unprecedented and concerning situation which is being monitored closely as safeguarding our members and their families against any potential risk remains a top priority. As a balanced, responsible and a mature partnership committed to mitigate the risk of spreading the virus without creating a panic situation, we have enforced several preventive measures viz:

- Mandatory sanitation at all office premises
- Implementation of guidelines from the Ministry of Health & Family Welfare and local health departments
- Body temperature screening of all employees and guests entering any of the firm's premises and provision of liquid hand wash and alcohol-based sanitizers

In an endeavour to continue servicing the needs of our clients internationally and across India it has been decided to deal with situations affecting members of the firm at each location on a case by case basis. Leveraging upon our strength of over 30 senior and matured partners spread across all offices of the firm, it is prudent that they exercise their judgement in each such case being mindful of the relevant circumstances.

Col. Dhiraj Wal as the Head Administrator of the firm is closely monitoring all the developments on a daily basis which of course are being constantly evaluated in case any additional measures need to be adopted. These would be reflected in the directions issued by him from time to time. All members of the firm should feel free to apprise him of their circumstances. Meanwhile, all members of the firm are advised to curtail all non-imperative, avoidable travel both domestically and internationally.

**Update 18 March, 18:45:** [Argus Partners](#) has also had a work-from-home policy since 14 March.

**18 March 2020, 19:48:** [Shardul Amarchand Mangaldas](#) has announced a WFH policy from yesterday, announcing the firm was ready to move to full WFH with immediate



also circulated a long list of measures and guidance for staffers to stay safe.

**Update: 19 March, 13:46** Several more firms have implemented WFH programmes:

- Desai & Diwanji went there from yesterday, 18 March 2020: "In view of the advisories issued by the relevant authorities in relation to social distancing, it has been decided that lawyers and staff members will have the option to work from home with immediate effect until further notice. Please note that our office will, however, continue to be operational with a skeletal staff for those who require its use, and we have taken special measures to ensure that it will be kept adequately sanitised. Having said that, we strongly recommend that visits to the office and physical meetings be kept to a minimum."
- IC Universal Legal has also implemented WFH from yesterday for a "large proportion of our members" and "for as many of our people as possible across our offices", which will remain open with skeleton staff.
- Juris Corp: "As the global concern about COVID-19 outbreak grows, Juris Corp is consciously observing physical distancing measures in order to reduce transmission of COVID-19 to the extent possible. In light of the same, Juris Corp has instituted a work from home policy effective 17th March 2020, in the interest and safety of its lawyers, staffs and clients. Juris Corp has always promoted use of technology to ensure seamless delivery of work, as a result of which the firm will be able to work remotely to meet the client's requirements."

**Update 17:45:** One law firm sent out an email to clients, following its earlier announcement that it would work from home:

However, things are not looking very encouraging in India and our offices will be closed with effect from today as the number of cases in India is increasing. The Hon'ble Prime Minister is scheduled to address the nation later in the evening today and we expect that there may be some tough decisions taken. With effect from today, we are shutting down all our offices across India and we all would be working from home remotely.

Khaitan's official policy was announced this morning and will kick in immediately, and is planned to run until 31 March 2020, pending any other developments.

It follows the official advice of the Ministry of Health and international health bodies to encourage "social distancing measures", which may be the only effective way of slowing down the spread of the virus.

Khaitan executive director human resources (HR) Amar Sinhji confirmed the steps, and said that the idea was that all staff and fee-earners should be able to take advantage of the new policy, particularly if they were using public transport to come into work or were in at-risk categories, such as the elderly, pregnant or those with underlying medical conditions, such as lung-disease or diabetes.

The IT infrastructure and logistics should be ready and able to cope, said Sinhji, anticipating that any potential issues would be ironed out in the coming days.

In exceptions where working from home might not be possible due to jobs that





work out suitable options with team leaders and individuals.

One option in such cases where some presence in the office was unavoidable, could include splitting team members 50/50, to work in the office on alternate days, for instance.

"For us, the safety, security and well-being of our members has always been our priority. The culture and ethos of our firm is that of a close knit family, that comes even closer and supports each other in times of crises. So, while we have adequate systems in place to ensure business continuity while we allow work from home in this unprecedented situation, we will do nothing that will compromise the safety & security of our members or their families," commented Amar Sinhji.

A number of other firms are either trialling or instituting work-from-home (WFH) policies this week in the COVID-19 pandemic, where advice and responses are evolving rapidly: [read our round-up for what bigger firms have been doing to get ahead of the crisis.](#)

Cyril Amarchand Mangaldas for instance was planning to stress-test 50%, and then 100%, working from home this week, while L&L Partners had upped its IT infrastructure capacity for staff to work from home.



with the corona virus contagion gaining momentum. All JSA offices will remain closed from tomorrow, Tuesday March 17 till further notice - subject only to exceptional circumstances where an EP requires access to the office for self or a team member for as short a duration as possible. ExCom will monitor the situation and keep you advised of any changes.

We as firm need to play our role in social distancing to mitigate the spread of the virus. All must co-operate and abide by the decisions set out herein scrupulously and diligently:-

1. To avoid any congregation of people please minimize physical meetings.
2. Attorneys must be instructed to be available at home to attend to work and take calls of their Team members and Clients. This is not a holiday. The Litigation and Regulatory teams may work this out as best as they can.
3. IT team working with EPs will ascertain if there are any gaps in our remote working capability and fix them at each location. To ensure effectiveness, each EP shall ascertain that the Secretaries in their respective Teams have access to a laptop. Based on necessity certified by EPs (not as an entitlement) the IT Dept will allocate a laptop from the IT Pool of spare laptops. IT Dept can also facilitate net connectivity and remote access to the documents. Laptops are being provided as an interim measure and shall be returned once we tide over this crisis.
4. All smart phones can be made into hotspots - please use that. Additional expense on account of usage for client work will be reimbursed.
5. Offices will maintain minimal/skeletal Staff according to the need of each location and instructions to be issued accordingly and the Staff & Housekeeping staff can be rotated on a roster to be established immediately. All ongoing precautions on sanitation must be observed.
6. Interns shall be instructed to not come to their designated offices but keep in touch with their supervising attorneys over email on research projects or other matters.
7. Each office will maintain a list of medical centres that can be accessed for screening, testing and treatment in the eventuality of a colleague or client or visitor to our facilities displaying symptoms of COVID-19 which warrants such action.
8. We have already undertaken a staff-sensitization exercise at each location last week.
  - (a) Basic information on COVID-19 and preventive measures undertaken must be displayed at the reception and other places within our facilities prominently.
  - (b) Vendors, couriers and all third parties shall be received at the reception area and not permitted to enter JSA facilities.
9. Communiques will be issued to inform and sensitize JSA Clients about remote working by our respective Teams - such that all attorneys and partners are available on phones (mobile/residential landlines), email, et al to avoid disruption in business but will not be physically available for any meetings. Clients shall be sensitized by putting in a *COVID safeguards notification* in our email signature.

Please share more useful ideas or initiatives (or lack thereof) in the comments below.

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