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Nooyi sees role in corporate world as 'privilege' Pepsi CEO gets taste of Birmingham

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Indra Nooyi was dubbed the most powerful woman in corporate America by Fortune magazine after she was tapped chairman and CEO of PepsiCo last fall.

The head of the Purchase, N.Y.-based company, described in media reports as a tough, fiercely competitive boss who drives her employees hard, showed off a softer side during a visit to Birmingham on Friday.

Nooyi, 51, came to the Magic City to tour the Oxmoor Road facilities of Birmingham based **Buffalo Rock** Co., which has been affiliated with Pepsi since 1951 and is now the soft drink company's sixth-largest bottler.

Her visit was also a way to show her appreciation to workers at family-owned **Buffalo Rock**, recently selected Bottler of the Year by Beverage Industry, a trade publication.

Upon stepping on a bus chartered by **Buffalo Rock** Friday morning, Nooyi greeted more than a dozen employees and executives accompanying her during a tour of Birmingham. The CEO, who has been known to show off her singing ability at company talent shows, opted not to do an impromptu performance while visiting **Buffalo Rock's** manufacturing plant.

But she laughed when asked about her singing background during a bus ride from Gardendale, where she had visited three grocery stores carrying Pepsi products, to a meeting with UAB President Carol Garrison. While attending college in her native India, she once fronted an all girl rock band.

"That's from my wild youth," she said with a chuckle. "Absolutely, I love to sing."

Nooyi said she tries to visit Pepsi bottlers in key markets such as Birmingham as often as she can. It is an idea she got from Don Kendall, the founder of PepsiCo, who has an office next to hers.

"He always told me that these bottlers are very close to the customers and if you really want to learn the business, talk to them and they will teach you things you'll never learn sitting in the office," Nooyi said.

Role model

Nooyi has been with PepsiCo. for 13 years, serving as president and chief financial officer before becoming chairman and CEO last October. She helped spin off PepsiCo's restaurant business and worked on the 1998 acquisition of juice maker Tropicana.

Nooyi was also PepsiCo's lead negotiator in its \$13.8 billion acquisition of Quaker Oats Co. in 2001.

She now has responsibility for the operations of an international company that has more than 150,000 employees and registered \$35 billion in revenue last year.

Buffalo Rock CEO Jimmy Lee III said Nooyi's aggressiveness is needed at the helm of Pepsi, which continues to slug it out with Atlanta-based Coca-Cola, the world's No. 1 beverage company.

"When you're competing against Coke in the Deep South, you can't be complacent," he said. "We're in their heartland, yet we've been able to develop a product line to become a significant market-share leader in a lot of our markets in the Deep South."

Nooyi grew up in a middleclass family in India and graduated from the Indian Institute of Management in Calcutta in 1976 before moving to the United States to pursue a master's degree at Yale University. Upon graduating, she started The Boston Consulting Group, which led her to strategy positions at Motorola and other companies before she joined PepsiCo.

Nooyi said she takes accolades she has earned as a role model for women and minorities very seriously, adding it is "an incredible privilege."

"I recognize this job comes with a great responsibility and act accordingly," she said.

"When you are a woman or minority in the workplace, you are different and can't hide that," Nooyi said. "PepsiCo is a company that believes our employee base should reflect our market base. We have a big push in making sure the company welcomes all kinds of people."

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INDRA NOOYI Title: Chairman and chief executive officer of PepsiCo. Age: 51 Background: born in India where she received her bachelor's degree, received master's degree from Yale School of Management in 1980, worked at Boston Consulting Group and Motorola History with PepsiCo: Joined the company in 1994, was named CFO in 2001, was named CEO in 2006.Honors: According to Forbes magazine's 2006 poll, Nooyi is the fourth-most powerful woman in the world. She was named the No. 1 Most Powerful Woman in Business in 2006 by Fortune magazine. Sources: Forbes and Fortune magazines