

Visionary entrepreneur guides Indian glassmaking evolution

Born and raised in Kolkata, Chandra Kumar Somany heads India's principal glass manufacturing group. Under his leadership, Hindusthan National Glass & Industries Ltd has emerged as the region's dominant supplier of containers and has also successfully diversified into the rapidly expanding float glass business. John Wallis highlights some of his achievements and current priorities.



C K Somany has created one of the international glass industry's most enduring family dynasties.

Together with his sons Sanjay and Mukul and grandson Bharat, C K Somany has created one of the international glass industry's most enduring family dynasties. Having started with a semi-automatic glass container production facility, HNG was India's first to convert to fully automatic operation in 1952. The business has been guided throughout by visionary entrepreneur C K who, even at the age of 77, still maintains a close involvement today as non-executive Chairman.

In fact, retirement does not seem to register on the C K Somany activity scale, other current roles including Chairman of the Glass & Glassware Panel at CAPEXIL, Chairman of the Society of Glass Technology (Indian Section) and Governing Body Member of the Government

College of Engineering & Ceramic Technology, Kolkata. He is also the past Chairman of the Development Panel for the Glass Industry, Government of India, as well as being a past President and still an Executive Committee Member of the All India Glass Manufacturers' Federation. In addition, Mr Somany conducts religious and social work.

This equates to 15 million bottles in sizes from 5ml to 3200ml for the liquor, beer, pharmaceutical, food and beverage sectors in flint, amber and green compositions.

In terms of float glass, HNG is geared primarily at the needs of the architectural market, pulling 600 tonnes/day. Thicknesses from 3.5mm to 12mm are available in clear, tinted

HNG Vision: *"To create a world class glass manufacturing plant that pursues quality, cost reduction and productivity improvement measures in a truly holistic manner, leading to customers', shareholders', employees' and suppliers' satisfaction; this integrated effort will result in the company becoming an industry benchmark and a role model for systems, processes and results."*

After qualifying in financial management in London, Mr Somany immersed himself in the glass industry, acquiring a strong reputation for his business and technical acumen. Over the years, advanced training was sought on various aspects of the glass manufacturing process, including the operation and maintenance of IS machines, mould design and factory instrumentation, relevant elements of which were integrated within HNG's expanding glassmaking operation.

PAN-INDIAN PRESENCE

Via its nationwide presence, HNG is India's largest glass packaging producer, with a manufacturing capacity of 2825 tonnes/day, satisfying over 50% of the local market demand.

and reflective forms.

Since establishing its original fully automatic container plant at Rishra, near Kolkata, with an installed capacity of 25 tonnes/day, HNG has created and acquired plants at Bahadurgarh, Rishikesh, Neemrana, Nashik and Puducherry. In addition to capturing a large share of the Indian market, the business satisfies a client base that extends to more than 23 countries, justifying C K Somany's life-long dedication to developing the company and its subsidiaries. "I am a firm believer in providing customer satisfaction by offering world class products via the use of the latest technology in glass manufacture" he confirms. Setting benchmarks in terms of product quality is a constant goal, as HNG

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C K Somany and son, Sanjay (centre) at GLASSPEX India 2009.

focusses on continuously upgrading its technology and expanding production capacity in a timely manner to ensure that customer demands are satisfied.

"Today, we are the largest container glass solutions provider in India and we look forward to being a global leader in the industry."

INTERNATIONAL STANDARDS

According to C K Somany, the Indian glass container industry has completed its transition from employing rudimentary mouth blown and hand working processes just a few decades ago to becoming a highly productive, fully automated business on a large scale today. "The industry has gone in for producing lightweight bottles, which can only strengthen its competitive position in the local packaging industry."

By integrating the latest innovations in manufacturing technology, Mr Somany believes the quality of Indian glassware is now comparable with international standards. HNG's increasing number of foreign customers confirms the point. Local consumers are also becoming more discerning, demanding higher levels of quality from Indian glassmakers. "Today, the gap between the world's glass manufacturers has become almost negligible."

To strengthen the industry's position further, C K Somany is an advocate of greater political leadership for environmental initiatives on a national level. "There is no proper system of cullet collection in India, a situation that is affecting glassmakers as their manufacturing costs continue to increase significantly."

Similarly, he believes the role played by the All India Glass Manufacturers' Federation to be an important one. Ongoing priorities are the promotion of additional glass consumption, arranging a workable cullet collection system and liaison with government authorities to represent the glass industry's collective interests. "Every industry requires a common platform through which all players can address common issues" Mr Somany asserts. "These issues include competition among the industry's players, policies framed by government authorities, business and industrial affairs... the operating environment of the

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Retirement does not seem to register on the C K Somany activity scale. He is shown here participating in the opening ceremony for GLASSPEX India 2009 exhibition.

glass industry is changing continuously and such federations act as an umbrella, as well as providing expert forums for the industry as a whole."

MUTUAL UNDERSTANDING

C K Somany is a firm believer in the principle of maintaining strong relationships with supplier organisations. "For example, the timely delivery of good quality raw materials by suppliers and prompt payment by glass manufacturers helps to build long-term beneficial relationships" he affirms. "A mutual understanding and symbiotic relationship can go a long way to helping each other, resulting ultimately in the manufacture of better products."

By the same token, rising raw materials costs represent one of the greatest challenges faced by Indian glassmakers in recent times, impacting their overall profitability. Coupled with competitive pressures from alternative packaging materials, Mr Somany does not believe the industry can afford to rest on its laurels. He recommends the widespread implementation of promotional campaigns to emphasise the purity of glass, as well as the material's environmental acceptability. In addition, he believes further integration of processes immediately before and after the glassmaking process itself will alleviate the impact of rising raw materials costs. ■

FURTHER INFORMATION:

Hindusthan National Glass & Industries Ltd, Kolkata, India
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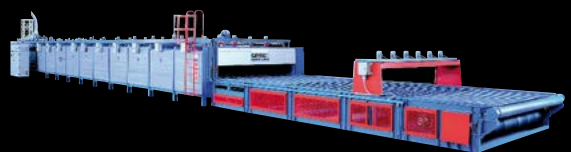
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