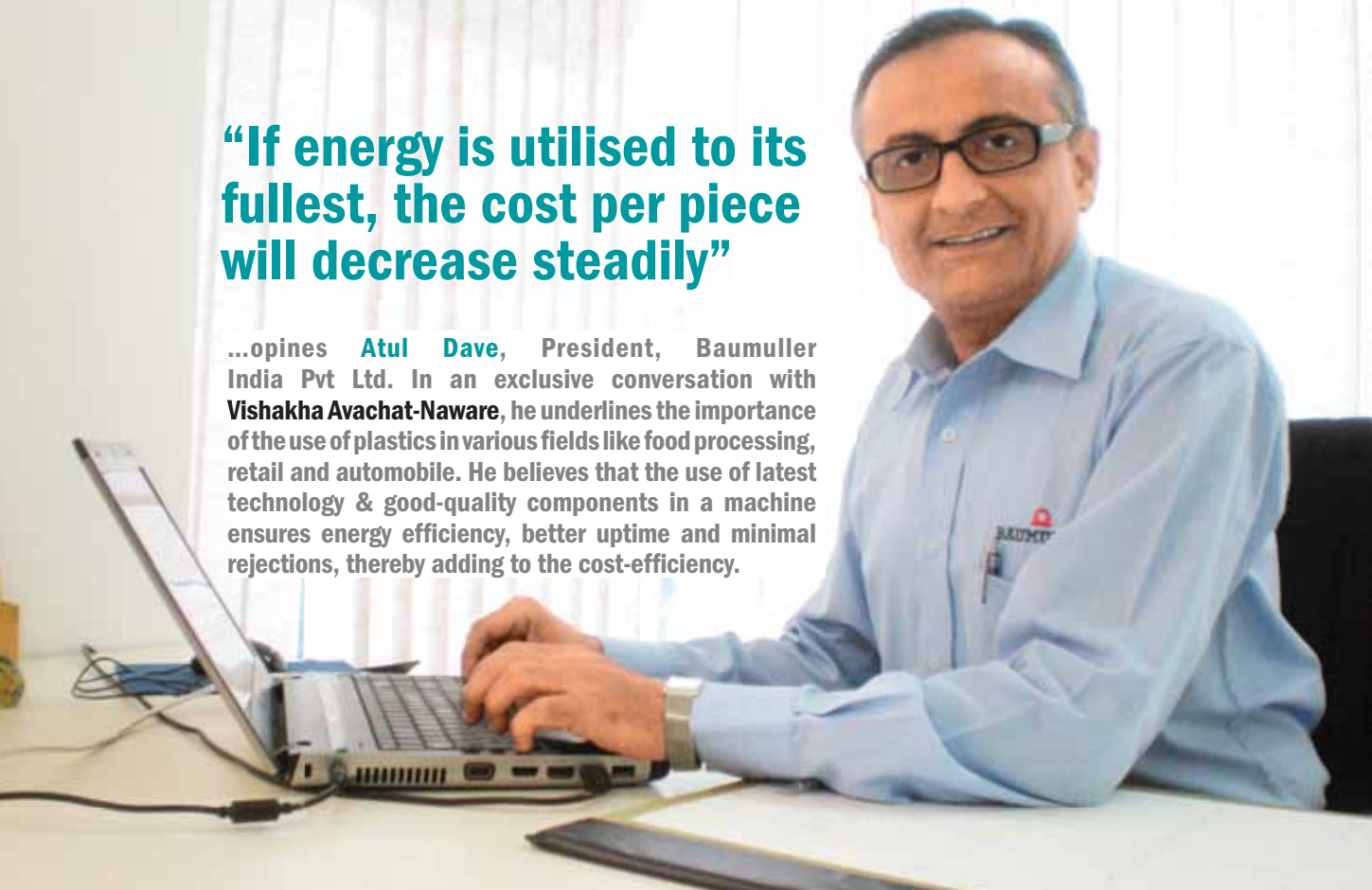


“If energy is utilised to its fullest, the cost per piece will decrease steadily”

...opines **Atul Dave**, President, Baumuller India Pvt Ltd. In an exclusive conversation with **Vishakha Avachat-Naware**, he underlines the importance of the use of plastics in various fields like food processing, retail and automobile. He believes that the use of latest technology & good-quality components in a machine ensures energy efficiency, better uptime and minimal rejections, thereby adding to the cost-efficiency.



Highlight the current market trends in the plastics and polymers industry.

The plastics and polymers industry is growing at a fast pace. Baumuller as a company concentrates on three processes – injection moulding, blow moulding and blown films – since a major portion of our business comes from these areas. Based on these basic categories, this industry has been growing at the rate of 20 per cent over the last 2-3 years. The plastic processing machinery industry is expected to continue growing in a similar fashion for the next 4-5 years.

Following are the reasons for this growth:

Investment in food processing: Food processing also comprises other agricultural practices, such as irrigation. Among all food items like fruits, vegetables, grains, etc that are produced in India, less than 50 per cent reaches the population. The remaining go waste and perish due to

lack of proper infrastructure in food processing segment across India. Realising this phenomenon, the government is now offering subsidiaries to ensure that at least 70 per cent of the foodstuffs produced reaches the population.

We expect growth in the use of plastics in food processing. This growth would be not only in food processing, but also in packaging. Generally, packaged food comes packed in plastic pouches, bags or containers. This will result in increased demand for plastics in this segment. Another area where plastics are and will be used in large quantities is irrigation. For example, Polyvinyl Chloride (PVC) pipes, rubber pipes and plastic components are used in drip irrigation.

Retail sector: The growing spending power of the Indian middle class has led to an increase in the packed food culture, and this will continue growing in future. This will provide an opportunity for further consumption of plastics in the

form of containers, bottles or films. The latest trend in plastic packaging in the retail sector is thermoforming. In this process, plastic granules are converted to a film. Thermoformed trays are used to pack products such as biscuits and chocolates.

Automobile sector: Car making utilises various plastic components. These plastic components are now manufactured in India for export to developed countries.

What are the latest developments and innovations in this area?

Three areas have seen a number of developments – energy efficiency, uptime of machine and quality of product.

In energy, the processes, mainly injection moulding and, to some extent, blow moulding, are witnessing new developments. Energy is an important cost factor in manufacturing. It constitutes the second highest cost that a manufacturer incurs in production. The highest cost

is incurred on raw materials. Processes like melting, blowing and injecting require huge amounts of energy. The biggest concern for those using injection moulding process is to make optimal use of the available energy. If technology is utilised to its fullest, the cost per piece will steadily decrease.

The second development is the higher uptime of machine or greater reliability of the machine. A manufacturer loses out on man-hours when a machine requires frequent repairs or in case of shutdown and maintenance activities.

The reliability of components used machines depends on the quality of components used. A well functioning machine can be achieved using good quality critical components like valves, controls, motor, sensors, etc. When the final product is made as per specifications, it ensures minimum rejections and optimum consumption of raw materials. Automation is a rising trend in this field.

Tell us about Baumuller's stint in India.

In India, Baumuller has recently opened a facility in Pune. We are greatly dependent on the plastics sector, so the growth in this industry has compelled us to expand our facilities. As Baumuller is a global company, our shareholders expect us to provide more services in the Southeast Asian region. When our customers provide their products to the Southeast Asian market, they expect our support in the form of customer visits, commissioning and troubleshooting. We provide services to companies in Southeast Asia and sales in India.

How has been your journey in this field?

After graduating from College of Engineering, Pune, I wanted to do something different. In my first job at Godrej, I opted for the production department, as I wanted to work on the shop-floor. Later, in companies like Philips and Festo, I worked in the field of industrial automation. Here, I got an opportunity to work like an entrepreneur and develop my industry skills. I learnt how to start a

business and got an opportunity to work with machine manufacturers from the fields of plastics, packaging & printing. By the time I joined Baumuller, I had an in-depth understanding of this field and its nuances.

What has been the biggest challenge pertaining to business decisions for you?

I have worked in up-market companies but not in a price-sensitive market. As the quality, reliability and after-sales service are good, the price of products is also high. Our strong technological support ensures long-term success. The biggest challenge for me has been to convince buyers about return on investment, even though the price of the products is high. I want to give this matter a thought and develop a new scheme of effective sales training for employees.

Who has been the greatest motivational force in your life? To whom would you attribute your success?

I am a keen learner and like to learn from every person I meet and every new thing I see. The seniors in my previous workplaces were very helpful and taught me a lot. Their teachings at the beginning of my career have been of great value.

Key demand drivers influencing the Indian plastics industry.

The per capita consumption of plastics in India is about 5 kg. This figure is quite low when compared to countries such as China and Brazil, where the consumption stands at 30 kg and 90 kg, respectively. Hence, we can confidently say that the plastics industry will flourish in India in the coming decade.

How do you see your company's growth potential in the Indian market?

The future of our company seems bright. We envision a 300 per cent growth in the next 5 years, as 40 per cent of our business comes from the plastics industry.

Any new technologies at Baumuller?

Some of the new technologies at Baumuller are as follows:

Servo pumps: Servo pump comes as a package that can be fitted into existing injection moulding machines, and this will bring down energy consumption by 50-60 per cent. The manufacturers using our machines need not buy a new machine. They can buy this package and fit it in their existing machines. The return on investment can be expected in 6-12 months. Our aim is to introduce these packages to our existing injection moulding customers.

Special motors or high-torque motors: These are highly energy-efficient motors, which require less maintenance, are compact and reliable. These motors are unique and only 2-3 manufacturers produce them across the world. These motors are widely used in the plastics machinery industry in developed countries – in injection moulding machines, extruders and blown film lines.

In addition, we are working on automation solutions like remote diagnosis through EtherCAT. This will help in machine support and maintenance from a remote location without actually visiting the site and, in the process, saving production man-hours.

What are your expansion and future plans in India?

We are planning to start facilities for sales and application support in different regions of the country. By the year end, we will start operating in New Delhi, Ahmedabad and Chennai. Apart from this, we will start some manufacturing facilities in Asia.

What would be your advice to aspiring and upcoming entrepreneurs in this domain?

The aspiring and upcoming entrepreneurs must work on improving their skills through learning, unlearning and re-learning. With technological upgradation, one needs to keep pace with new trends & benefits derived, and must be able to adopt changes as quickly as possible. ■