

# Environment overrides profit motive

Venkat Raman

An Indian entrepreneur is so concerned with the environment that he spends more time in finding ways and means of controlling pollution than chasing profits for his progressive and successful group of companies.

Environment was also the factor that brought back Bajaj Electricals Limited (BEL) chairman and managing director Shekhar Bajaj to New Zealand last fortnight.

But this time he put together a group of 250 staff, distributors and suppliers, apart from his son and executive director Anant Bajaj and executive president and chief operating officer R Ramakrishnan.

“Entrepreneurs, top executives, middle management staff and individuals must think of the environment and take steps to control pollution.

“While commercial viability is important for companies to grow, that should not be at the expense of the environment. We have ignored ecological issues for long,” he told Indian Newslink during an interview.

But the group of companies he heads is no small player in the Indian economy and increasingly in overseas markets.

While the US\$ 3 billion Bajaj Group of companies of which he is a director, is involved in a broad spectrum of industries, BEL’s activities include manufacture of lights, light fittings, fans, electrical appliances, engineering and other projects.

Mr Ramakrishnan said BEL products are exported to several countries in Asia, the Middle East, Africa, Europe and New Zealand.

“The turnover target for the current financial year is US\$350 million and the profit after tax of US\$12 million, up from US\$275 million and US\$10 million respectively,” he said.



Mr Bajaj (centre) with his son Anant and COO Mr Ramakrishnan in Auckland  
Picture/Indian Newslink ©

Mr Bajaj is happy to leave the administration of his group to his son and other management professionals and concentrate on environment.

And when his wife Kiran (who managed the group’s travel agency for about 28 years) mooted the idea of a not-for-profit organisation, *Paryavaran Mitra (Friends of Environment)* was born in September 2004.

From its headquarters in Shikohabad in the North Indian state of Uttar Pradesh, the organisation is today spread all over India.

“It was initiated with the vision, concern and passion of Ms. Bajaj and other like-minded people, who care for the environment.

“It is like any other form of friendship where there is love, care, affection and concern for our environment. It is a small reciprocation of all that the environment

provides us, so selflessly,” Mr Bajaj said.

Although he did not claim expertise in environment, his group of companies has set examples. They are environment friendly, clean and green and carry concepts of ecological enhancement.

He hoped that the pristine beauty and clean environment that his delegation saw in New Zealand would be partially implemented in India.

Mr Bajaj said a meeting with prime minister Helen Clark in Auckland was among the highlights of his visit.

“We discussed various opportunities to pick up technology in the hi-tech area that can be offered by New Zealand entrepreneurs and also some items that can be sourced from India, rather than putting all the eggs in the Chinese basket,” he said.

Ms Clark said entrepreneurs like Mr Bajaj made a difference to not only the environment but also management of businesses.

She said her discussions with Bajaj, along with a New Zealand Trade & Enterprise investment advisor set the pace for BEL’s greater involvement with New Zealand.

“Although a small country with a small market, New Zealand has an affluent society that the Bajaj group would find attractive. As a large conglomerate, BEL would find our country a good place to do business,” Ms Clark said.

Law firm MinterEllisonRuddWatts hosted a reception in his honour at their Auckland office, which was attended by officials of the Asia NZ Foundation who coordinated his visit and a number of businesspersons and professionals.