

## INDIAN COMMUNITY

Krishna Kumar Agrawal:

# Keeping customers loyal crucial to business growth

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He has 53 years' work experience. He is a successful and award-winning businessman who runs a textile company that has a turnover of more than US\$200 million and employs 3,700 people. He was born in India 76 years ago and is now a proud Indonesian citizen. Despite his busy business schedule, the well-respected Indian-Indonesian never misses social and business gatherings in Jakarta. He is a healthy septuagenarian and frequent traveler.

He is none other than Krishna Kumar Agrawal, president director of PT Bitratex Industries, a manufacturer of quality spun yarns. Bitratex Group is Indonesia's leading quality yarn manufacturer and exports most of its products to more than 40 countries and sells around 30 percent on the domestic market.

While retaining customers remains a tough challenge for some companies amid an increasingly competitive environment, Agrawal has found the secret to keeping customers coming back to his company.

"Customers' loyalty comes from two major factors. The first is the quality of our products. Customers find that they had no problem with repeat supplies; they always come back to us. We take full responsibility for our products and respond immediately if there is the slightest problem at any time," said the naturalized Indonesian, who was born in Varanasi, India, in 1940.

"Second is honoring our commitments of timely supplies even in situations when the market fluctuates," explained the businessman,

adding that "Personal contacts play an important role in developing our relations with customers."

Bitratex was started back in 1979. Under Agrawal's leadership, the group has grown fourfold, thanks heavily to growing customers' loyalty. In addition, the Bitratex Group acquired a distressed company, namely PT Primayudha Mandirijaya, in the same line of business of manufacturing yarn in 2008 and turned it around. Currently, Primayudha's products command the same preference as Bitratex. Thus the annual production capacity of the group now has reached 80,000 metric tons (MT).

In the last 37 years, the company has exported its products to customers in more than 40 countries, of which many are Bitratex's loyal customers. Bitratex's growth performance, especially in regard to exports, is evidenced by the company having received numerous awards, including the prestigious Primaniyarta Award from the government of Indonesia for consistent and commendable export performances.

"We have received the Primaniyarta Award not once but eight times. This is because of our overall export performance and consistent growth in export volume," Agrawal, who first came to Indonesia in 1973, said.

"In addition, we have received the green rating for environmental care," he noted.

According to him, the company has also maintained harmonious relations with its employees, settled all taxes in time, honored its commitment with lenders even during the financial crises of 1998 and 2008, and has undertaken corporate social responsibility activities regularly. "All of these

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factors have been recognized in terms of awards," he said.

For Bitratex, loyalty does not mean only from customers but also employees as, he says, a dedicated and well-trained workforce is the company's greatest strength.

"We have created a good working environment in which every employee feels happy, safe and secure about their job and contributes their best according to their role.

"We have employees who have worked with us since the company started in 1981. Apart from timely payment as per regulations, we provide residential accommodation and other facilities, which boosts employee loyalty and longer tenures," he said, adding that the company employs 3,700 people.

"We have regular training facilities for new and existing employees. The human resources is the most important asset for us."

With Agrawal dedicating an important period of his life to Bitratex, it is natural to attribute the success of the company to how he views corporate issues, including that on leadership, one of the aspects that plays a pivotal role in growing a company.

"I think the most important quality of a leader is to create an at-

mosphere where everyone works as part of a team. This means decisions are made with consensus," Agrawal, who studied commerce and law at India's famous Banaras Hindu University in Varanasi, said.

"Everyone is given the opportunity to offer their views and then we decide with mutual agreement where everyone stands with the decision," he stated.

"As a good leader you have to deal fairly with all the stakeholders, such as customers, suppliers, bankers and employees, which develops trust in your organization," he opined.

Asked what his motto in life is, he said, "The motto of my life is to remain focused on the purpose and to continue 'hard work' ... that's the way to succeed."

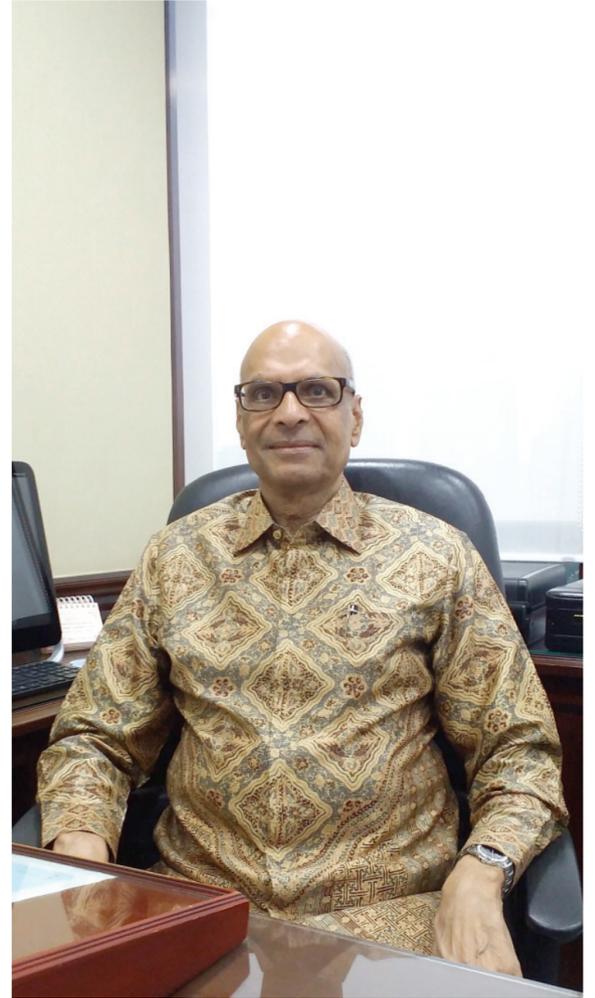
Agrawal starts his day at 5 a.m. with a regular walk and yoga exercise followed by tea time with family members. "I exercise every day ... otherwise I'd get older and sick," he said with a laugh.

Away from the job, he spends time traveling, watching TV and attending social gatherings with friends and family. "I travel to India few times a year," he said.

Agrawal is not only one of the approximately 300,000 Indian Diaspora in Indonesia but is also one of the important leaders of the Indian community. His company is also among those that contributes to the economic growth of the country by providing employment to many, paying taxes and contributing to the export earnings of Indonesia.

"I would like to convey to my young friends that hard work has no alternative," he said.

"Do your work honestly and keep up the good name of the country where you came from," he concluded.



Krishna Kumar Agrawal

JP/Sudibyo M. Wiradji

## RI, India responsible for Indian Ocean maritime security

The maritime links between India and Indonesia are many centuries old. Maritime trade was most evident during the Pallava and the Chola dynasties. Very cordial relations were said to exist between the kingdoms of Srivijaya and Chola and both countries exchanged merchants and traded goods. The influence of Hinduism, Buddhism and even Islam made their entry into Indonesia through the Indian Ocean. But with Indonesia's growing concern for maritime sovereignty and the Western Pacific, its attention to the Indian Ocean suffered and as a result the maritime relations between India and Indonesia could not grow extensively even after such strong historical links.

Strategically, Indonesia has a common maritime boundary with India. Indonesia is an important player in the global shipping industry given most of the strategic sea lanes of communication (SLOCs) namely the straits of Malacca, Sunda, Lombok and Makassar border the Indonesian archipelago. The Malacca Strait is very strategic for India as about 40 percent of India's imports come through this strait. India and Indonesia are also among the biggest littoral and resource-rich countries of the Indian Ocean region (IOR).

On a close observation of the defense policies of both countries, a lot of convergences can be noticed. Both for a very long period have had an inward-looking or land-based defense policy. In the current phase given the rising strategic and geo-political importance of the Indo-Pacific region, both have embraced the term "Indo-Pacific" with Indonesia putting a little spin by coming up with a new coinage, "PACINDO". India and Indonesia are the most pivotal countries responsible for the maintenance of maritime security in the Indian Ocean through the control of non-traditional threats such as piracy, illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing, and the influx of refugees through the Indian Ocean.

The Indian Navy is also very important in securing the eastern part of the Indian Ocean as well as the South China Sea (SCS) as both the navies mainly desire



Premesha Saha

the maintenance of freedom of navigation in the SCS. According to some news reports there are talks being conducted on the prospect of joint maritime patrols by Indonesia and Australia in the SCS. Given the similar interests of the navies, India could also take part in the joint patrols.

The Indian and Indonesian navies signed the first security agreement in 1958. The first joint naval exercise by the navies was held in July 1960. The two also co-sponsored the Indian Ocean Zone of Peace Proposal (IOZOP). The Indian Navy participated in the 1995 International Fleet Review held in Jakarta to commemorate Indonesia's 50 years of independence. Both navies have conducted coordinated patrols in the Six Degrees Channel. Starting from 2002 India and Indonesia have been engaging in coordinated patrols called the Ind-Indo COPAT. Indonesia also participates in India-led multilateral naval exercises, such as the MILAN and SAREX exercises, and the Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS). In the aftermath of the 2004 tsunami, Indonesia highly appreciated the Indian Navy's Operation Gambhir for humanitarian assistance in January 2005.

The launch of President Joko "Jokowi" Widodo's "Global Maritime Fulcrum" (GMF) doctrine which focuses on five key areas: maritime culture; marine resources; archipelagic connectivity; maritime diplomacy; and naval development provides a platform for India to deepen its maritime relations with its neighbor. The main crux of Jokowi's GMF is bringing about infrastructure development through the boosting of inter-island connectivity. India, like China and Japan, can also contribute in this infrastructure project. China through its One Belt One Road (OBOR) initiative

and Japan are already actively being associated with this connectivity project. A few India private companies have played a role, but the Indian government and the public sector has not been able to cultivate on this opportunity.

Both countries are on the path to renew these maritime cultures. Therefore, Indonesia's GMF and India's Project Mausam: Maritime Routes and Cultural Landscapes across the Indian Ocean can be linked together as well. There have been reports on India again reviving its spice route and cotton route in view of China's Maritime Silk Road initiative. Indonesia in rebuilding its maritime culture can also look toward reviving its "cinnamon route", which can provide an opportunity for the linking of these projects.

India can also be a contributing factor in Indonesia's naval development goal. There can be cooperation on naval technology transfers. Indian shipbuilding companies can enter into joint ventures with Indonesian shipbuilding companies. Besides Cochin, other transit points like Vishakhapatnam, Mumbai can be opened for Indonesian ships to transit the Indian Ocean.

Indonesia, the current chair of the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA), is keen to strengthen maritime relations with other IORA members. Indonesia can learn some lessons from India's tenure as the chair of the IORA. Indonesia can work toward a stronger implementation or enforcement of the Bengaluru Communiqué of 2011 whereby maritime security was added as one of the primary concern areas for the IORA. This will lead to all the littoral countries of the region working together for maritime security in the Indian Ocean.

The December 2016 visit by President Jokowi to India, the issuance of the "Statement by India and Indonesia on Maritime Cooperation" and Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Act East policy are added impetuses in the growing maritime relations.

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