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Will the Modi formula work?

**Much more is needed
to become a global supply chain**



Composites to the fore

A low-profile company in Goa designs and manufactures a range of systems and products from suburban train coaches to racing cars and high-tech equipment for aerospace and defence



*Sardesai
has no time for
susegat*

Innovation has always been a way of life for composites pioneer Kineco Ltd all through the 25 years of its existence. Launched as a small unit at Pilerne in Goa, its silver jubilee sees it as an established name across the spectrum from railways to air to outer space.

"Composites are still a nascent industry in India," says the company's executive vice-chairman and managing director Shekhar Sardesai, a fabrication engineer who set up Kineco as a small unit in May 1995 after an eight-year stint in executive roles at a number of engineering and manufacturing companies. "Only a handful of companies have reached our level." This, he explains, is why he has achieved a turnover of only ₹185 crore. "We missed the ₹200-crore milestone because of Covid-19."

The pandemic and the subsequent lockdown, he feels, have had an impact of which the ripples will be felt on even in the years to come. Its definitive effects on business may be difficult to fathom since the situation is still so volatile; but it will profoundly influence how business will be done in the future, and the export potential may come under 'serious threat'.

"Kineco started with my ambition to do something different. Composites as a material of construction provided us with that platform," Sardesai explains. "Over the years, with what Kineco has done, I think I have come a long way in achieving this ambition. We have always been an accomplishment-driven venture and I think that is the single largest differentiator between us and the competition."

Along the way, Kineco has been the flag bearer for many initiatives under the 'Make in India' mission. "This movement will see massive growth and sustenance," Sardesai forecasts. "Re-strategising and realigning to this vision of the government will help attract capital investment that is going to happen as a fallout of this crisis."

Being a critical vendor to the

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The high-tech plant: everything for everybody

essential services to the telecom sector, too, Kineco was, however, partially operational during the lockdown phases. Deliveries were at a standstill, with obstacles at every step of the supply chain: movement of labour and managing cash crunches, especially the fixed costs, were the main challenges. "These restrictions may be slowly easing, but uncertainty glooms over the entire industry," Sardesai says. He has enunciated a five-point mantra to follow while re-aligning his strategy: conserve cash and stay liquid; be innovative and refresh his product strategy to stay in line with the current scenario; find ways to generate additional revenue streams by introducing new products or re-engineering to optimise

the utilisation of the existing facilities and staff; re-align cost structures and be frugal; and, most importantly, continue to build trust with stakeholders to support sustainable restructuring.

Also, as most of Kineco's business is B2G (Business to Government), its business may not be affected largely.

As he told his team members at the silver jubilee celebration: "It is truly gratifying to witness the seed I sowed 25 years ago blossom into a massive tree. Keep up example of optimism, hard work, team spirit and never-say-die attitude. Our core values of sincerity and integrity have enabled us to create an ecosystem of loyal partners, which is very essential for any enterprise to sustain." He urged all the

team members to continue displaying these qualities.

Kineco's legacy of innovation is impressive: it was the first to manufacture a dorsal unit for an airborne composite radar system, the AEWAC (airborne early warning and control). Its series of other firsts included being the only Indian company to manufacture composite formula racing cars and composite bow-and-hull-mounted Sonar domes for the Indian Navy's warships, as well as India's first fully-carbon-fibre lightweight rapid deployable, heliportable bridge for military and disaster management applications. Along the way, it has also executed the best-in-class project for the Indian Railways' EMU (electric multiple unit) coaches, which is Kineco's own concept.

Being honoured

Among other key programmes are a Mission Crew Workstation (MCW) console structure installed onboard Boeing's P8 Poseidon multi-mission maritime aircraft, a long-term contract for the supply of over 1,900 ship-sets to Safran Nacelle, UK, composite parts for Israel aerospace industries and the successful indigenisation of over 400 unique parts on HAL's Advanced Light Helicopter (ALH) platform of over 25,000 parts it has supplied to be rated its largest proven supplier. Last year, Kineco was also honoured on Navy Day (4 December), for its 'Make in India' programme in defence.

In 2004, the company established an advanced composite division (ACD) with know-how from Kaman Aerospace group of the US. The ACD was transformed eight years later into a joint-venture company, Kineco Kaman Composites India Pvt Ltd, which now boasts BAE Systems, Safran Nacelle, RAFAEL Advanced Defence Systems and HAL among its customers.

Kineco's 16,000 sq m manufacturing facilities allow the manufacture of railway products to meet the large market. Its range of products includes modular toilets, front end cabs, hard seating systems and rail car interiors. It also does mass manufacturing of different types of driver's consoles for train applications, hard seating systems for suburban and metro trains using glass fibre composites

A COMPOSITE JOURNEY

1995: Kineco begins commercial operations with a workforce of just 10 people.

1999: Serving the nation: Kineco builds Fibre Reinforced Plastic (FRP) shelters for Indian troops fighting in the harsh environment of the Northern Himalayas

2002: Supporting water needs: Kineco becomes a global supplier of tripod bases for a \$2-billion US water treatment equipment company

2003: "Supplier of the Year" award for delivery of tripod bases for water treatment equipment

2004: "Supplier of the Year" award for second consecutive year for delivery of tripod water treatment bases

2004: In association with IIT-Bombay and

TIFAC, Kineco constructs the world's first Sky Bus made entirely from composites.

2005: New autoclave incorporates the latest technology into the company's processes

2005: Selected to manufacture body panels for A1 Grand Prix formula racing cars in its brand new Advanced Composites Division

2008: "JEC Innovation Award" for the development of underslung water tanks for air-conditioned coaches of the Indian Railways.

2010: JV with ALTE Transportation, Spain for rail car interiors/exterior and toilet modules/systems

2013: JV with Kaman Aerospace Group Inc, US for advanced composites for defence and aerospace applications



or polycarbonate material with a metallic support structure toilet modules and under-carriage water tanks, which is an innovative and unique development.

Kineco is involved in design, design validation, tooling, prototyping and serial manufacturing of composite skins for automotive markets. Most of its products are custom-designed to customer requirements. The product range includes truck and bus interiors and exteriors, tractor hoods and car body parts.

It also offers built-to-print manufacturing capabilities as a supplier to branded boat manufacturers in India. "Kineco's expertise of over a decade in composite manufacturing ensures that our customers get high-quality decks and hulls for their leisure yachts," Sardesai says. "Our in-house tooling/mould making facilities make it easier for us to cater to varying design requirements of our customers and with an eye for aesthetics, which is the main requirement in the leisure boat category of the boat industry."

Going forward, Sardesai wants to make Kineco a globally-recognised composite solution provider to high-performance markets in the aerospace and defence sectors. To achieve this, the company set up a full-fledged design and development centre 10 years ago, equipped with world-class infrastructure and the best available human talent. "With this centre in place, any customer can come up to us and say, 'Here is our problem – give us a composite solution', and we should

be able to go to customers anywhere in the world and say, 'Challenge us – we are ready to compete with the best in the world'," he says.

Satisfied customers

Companies that deal with Kineco are a satisfied lot. Says Gilbret, director- procurement & business development, at Entegris Inc, France, "We conducted a review of GRP companies all over the world that could provide us with novel technical capabilities and competitive pricing, which were all key parameters to succeed in the new markets. We finally selected Kineco amongst seven other companies we had shortlisted globally. Over the last eight years, we have progressively got our first successes, until we made a significant breakthrough on some of the largest projects in the world. Together we have developed a great product, underground tanks, and I am confident that together we can win additional big projects."

Adds Rear Admiral Nirmal Menon, director general, naval design (submarine), Indian Navy, in a message on the silver jubilee, "My association with Kineco during the development of a sonar dome for destroyers has been very good. I have seen professionalism from the entire team. I hope to see more innovative indigenous products for defence over the coming years."

V.V. Parlikar, director (R&D EE), DRDO, Pune, says, "Our association dates back to 2006, when we first developed the antenna cabins. There has been no looking back since and the

first indigenous sonar dome has been a feather in our cap. I really appreciate the culture at Kineco. We hope this association continues to grow."

At the supplier end, Dr P.K.C. Bose, former vice-chairman & managing director of Saertex India, describes Kineco as "the most innovative, creative and flexible company, which has made remarkable achievements in advanced composites." Saertex was the exclusive supplier to them for glass and carbon fabrics.

Among Kineco's strategic objectives are to be the market leader in supply of composite-based interiors to the Indian Railways in its modernisation mission in terms of better interiors; a key supply-chain partner in the indigenous defence manufacturing ecosystem; and an integrated supplier of aircraft components and sub-assemblies to Tier I suppliers for the aerospace industry. In the drive to keep reinventing itself, the company will create new business verticals by leveraging its current process capabilities and through strategic acquisitions, as well as set up new SBUs (strategic business units) which will be growth drivers.

Sardesai, on his part, is confident that he and his company have just come to the beginning of their ₹1,000-crore journey, which they will complete over the next five years. "It took us 25 years of constant trials and tribulations to reach this base camp. Our eyes now are firmly glued to Mission Everest!" he grins.

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