

C&MD's Message on the occasion of 150th Foundation Day – 1st February 2016

Today, as we step into our 150th year of Foundation, I feel proud and honoured to be leading a conglomerate that has successfully steered through the testing times of business and has sustainably created value for all its stakeholders. We are extremely fortunate that we will together witness a great moment of pride in the corporate history of the nation, as Balmer Lawrie attains a unique milestone that would be etched in golden letters. Our journey has been a long one, and this incredible journey of ours is a testimony of the vision, entrepreneurship spirit and commitment of our Founders and Leaders. Let's take this moment to pay homage to our Founders and reminisce those noteworthy accomplishments that created an institution which prides on its diversity.

Our Founding Fathers had formed Balmer Lawrie & Co. as an 'agency house' and the agency business was essentially in trading. The business was shaped by the background of the founding partners and the opportunities offered by the environment. The initial Balmer Lawrie products for trading were primarily captive to tea gardens. They included tea lead, tea seeds, kerosene, blankets, drugs and pharmaceuticals, wines and spirits, apparel and accessories, steel, paints and lubricating oils. The basic character of the business i.e. 'commission agency' remained unaltered for many years. A combination of visionary entrepreneurship and committed workforce choreographed Balmer Lawrie's transformation into a diversified group with strong leadership in both manufacturing and services.

We have been a pioneer in greases & speciality lubricants manufacturing and a leader in barrel manufacturing. We were the first amongst PSEs to set up a manufacturing facility abroad and set up a number of Joint Venture companies to take forward the economic liberalization process. We were the first company amongst PSEs to offer shares to employees and we were the first company in India to issue Commercial Paper. Balmer Lawrie slowly and steadily evolved into a mature institution that had the business acumen and knew the nuances of venturing into new businesses and exiting non-viable ones. Our corporate milestones and the history of our evolution make good read. I encourage you to take time off and read the "Footprints on the Sands of time" written by our ex-Managing Director Mr. S K Sinha and learn about the company that cherishes such a rich history and legacy.

The last three decades have been pretty significant in terms of the evolution of the present day businesses. We expanded our product ranges in barrel manufacturing and greases & lubricants. Huge investments were made in new offices for Travel and Logistics, and in new plants and Research & Development for the manufacturing businesses. The Applications Research Laboratory was set up in 1981 and Product Development Centres and a Technical Service Centre were set up in the early 1990s. In FY 1994-95 the first Container Freight Station was commissioned in Kolkata. Subsequently CFSs were built in Mumbai and Chennai. A distinct trend was consistent high performance and our company never made losses in its entire journey spanning over the last 149 years.

In the recent years we have invested in technology to keep pace with the challenges of the changing business environment. While we are future ready with a robust Strategic Plan, we need to take stock of the external environment as well. Domestic and Global economy continues to be in rough weather with global slowdown driven by a slumbering China. As an integral part of this global eco-system, Balmer Lawrie too, is expected to feel the heat. However, world leaders shared optimism at World Economic Forum in Davos recently on the potential that India presents in global economic recovery. I think that is great news for us as an organisation with solid manufacturing ability and diversified talent pool. We need to stay focused and strategize to leverage our ability to deliver on the Country's promise of 'Make in India' and contribute significantly to crank up the growth Engine.

Our goal has always been to focus on the triple bottomline, and I feel happy that Balmer Lawrie has been privileged to be a part of the Hon'ble Prime Minister, Shri Narendra Modi's vision to realize Gandhiji's dream of a 'Clean India'. We implemented the "Swachh Vidyalaya" program in Government Schools covering states of Assam, Chhattisgarh, Haryana, Andhra Pradesh and West Bengal. The Company has constructed/refurbished a total of 306 toilets and was the first PSU under MOPNG to have completed the construction of toilets on target. The responsibility lies on all of us to keep our surroundings clean. So, I would call upon all my dear colleagues to please dedicate two hours a week to this wonderful mission.

I am optimistic about our future and as the economy starts growing faster, we must stay prepared to proactively seize the opportunities. It is time for us to collaborate, to innovate and leverage our strengths to be amongst the market leaders in all our business segments. Let's move ahead with utmost zeal and excitement and pledge our commitment to not only our customers but all stakeholders who would be a part of our journey in the future years.

It's time to celebrate the 150th Foundation Day; my best wishes to you and your family on this momentous occasion!

Prabal Basu