



Keen to serve the new world with #MakeInIndia approach

Abhijeet Pai - President,
Puzzolana

“With vaccinations for Covid-19 in progress, we expect the Indian construction equipment manufacturing industry to catch up pace and achieve pre-pandemic levels in next six months to a year. Puzzolana India is geared for the expected demand and has added new manufacturing and refurbishment plants and machines to its offerings and aiming for key highway construction projects,” says Abhijeet Pai, President, Puzzolana India in an interview with Jyoti Verma, Managing Editor, Crushing & Quarrying World

How has the ongoing pandemic affected the construction equipment manufacturing industry, globally and in India?

As with the rest of the world, the Indian construction equipment manufacturing industry too has been adversely affected due to the sudden lockdown last year where all activities came to a complete standstill. As all transporters were forced to suspend operations, this directly affected raw material supplies. The mass migration last year also affected operations as many factory workers left for their home towns. However, as the lockdowns were gradually eased, manufacturing did pick up. Orders have since then improved substantially from almost nil though not yet to the pre-

pandemic levels. Infrastructure / construction activities being one of the key drivers of the economy, restrictions were eased early for resumption of work, of course with precautions in place & limited personnel & permitted working hours. While they haven't reached the levels prior to the pandemic, the silver lining is that as the vaccination drives make progress, the belief & hope is that in the next 6-12 months manufacturing activities will return to pre-pandemic levels. The other encouraging factor is that tenders & awards for national highway construction work have continued at almost the same pre-pandemic levels.

How has the Covid-19 pandemic and the following lockdowns affected your operations, products and

services in India? What plans do you have for the forthcoming months?

As with other manufacturing sectors, our operations were severely affected due to the lockdowns as manufacturing activity came to a complete halt during the lockdown. Existing orders couldn't be executed, thus affecting not just manufacturing activities but cash flows too. While manufacturing activity & after sales service have picked up, they haven't reached normal levels as many states still have certain restrictions in place.

One of the major issues that has affected not just construction equipment manufacturing is the abnormal steep rise in steel prices, which have almost doubled in the past five months.



Compounding this are galloping fuel prices, which have contributed to further increasing the landed price of raw materials / components. This has put tremendous pressure on margins as executing firm orders becomes challenging with rapidly increasing raw material prices. While the union government has been seized of the issue for the past several months, we have yet to see any cooling off on these prices.

What has been Puzzolana's advancements in terms of R&D, technology adoption and new products / services / programs in recent months? Any product launches expected in coming months?

Puzzolana, a home grown, indigenous organization, believes in continually improving the design & performance of their crushing equipment & the last few months have been no different. As with every product, consumer or industrial, customer expects & rightly so the best return for his / her purchase. It is this driving

force that inspires us to look at ways and means of improving productivity of machines. Towards the end of the year, we are planning to launch some new models into the market.

To consolidate & expand our facilities, we have added a new foundry and a rubber belt manufacturing unit in North India. To cater to our customers in the north, we are also in the process of setting up a refurbishment centre. The rubber belt manufacturing unit would significantly add to our in-house capabilities as conveyors are an integral part of the crushing & screening plant.

We have also introduced a new jaw crusher of 1000 TPH & cone crusher of 500 TPH capacities, which would enhance our offerings for large capacity plants. The 1000 TPH jaw crusher model is already successfully operating & has created quite a buzz in the market place, Puzzolana has also successfully introduced long distance / barge loading conveyors.

Tell us about the company's SOP- COVID-19 measures and ways these have benefited the organisation and its supply chain.

The company has put into place the best practices possible in dealing with the Covid 19 pandemic with all the standard practices in place, viz. hand sanitizing, social distancing, etc. Relevant posters have been put up at all important locations, especially in shop floors & washrooms. Daily checking / recording of temperature at the time of entering the office / shop floor premises have been diligently carried out for more than a year.

Vaccination for employees & their eligible family members have also been completed. For employees who unfortunately contracted the virus, necessary assistance was provided for hospitalization, oxygen support, etc. Puzzolana has also ensured that employees of their vendors & sub-contractors have been vaccinated.





these new upcoming road contracts enable you to meet the FY21 target? Are there other such opportunities or new projects that you are excited about?

As mentioned earlier, one of the encouraging signs that help in keeping optimism in the sector is the continuing good pace of MoRTH/NHAI/NHIDCL in tendering & awarding of highway construction projects. In addition to the widening of highways, announcements of new expressway projects such as Delhi-Dehradun, Chennai-Surat, Hyderabad-Visakhapatnam, etc. Not only are these very encouraging in keeping up the momentum of the construction equipment manufacturing in just the short & medium term but significantly in the long term too.

In the railways sector too marquee projects like the Ahmedabad-Mumbai Bullet Train are inspiring for the sheer scale & opportunities it provides. That several other stretches are under study, e.g. Mumbai-Pune-Hyderabad, Chennai-Hyderabad-Bangalore-Mysore, etc. is another encouraging sign for long term prospects of construction equipment manufacturing.

How many crushing machines have you installed in India and internationally?

Puzzolana is proud of having the largest number of installations in the country, over 4,500+. These include several installations in more than 20 countries, viz. Oman, Dubai, Kenya, Malaysia, Nepal, Bhutan, etc. Puzzolana

has also had the privilege of working with one of the world's largest cement, aggregates & concrete conglomerates in setting up their aggregate crushing plants in Zambia & Bangladesh.

This large installation base has made Puzzolana a household name for many corporate customers & commercial quarrying owners in setting up their aggregate crushing & screening plants. This has also helped us gain substantial in-house knowledge & expertise in addressing several challenging applications.

Please tell us more about the after-sales service/AMC programmes that you run for your clients.

Puzzolana has established an





extensive service network across the country, each region having a head & a team of service engineers below him at various places in the vicinity of customers' installations. This has ensured that our service engineers are close by & are able to reach the site at the earliest possible time frame.

need to be maintained at site.

Do you see an ease of liquidity in construction equipment finance, particularly for retail customer by end of FY21?

One significant development in equipment financing is that financiers are now taking a more

idle for extended periods requires extra expenses to bring it back to working condition.

How do you foresee private sector participation in highway project implementation, considering the Government of India has allowed InvITS to tap pension and insurance funds?

4500+ Installations



How do you manage spare parts' availability to customers spread across India?

As timely availability of spares is critical to minimizing downtime, we ensure that the fast moving spare and wear parts are available to all our customers through our dealers spread across India. Our service engineers also regularly advise customers on critical spares that

holistic view of not just credentials of the potential equipment owner/lessee but also the project's progress, viz. zero date, approvals, environmental clearances, etc. This is to ensure that the lessee would have sufficient cash flows during the project execution to be able to meet his financial commitments. Additionally, this ensures that the equipment continues to be in a good condition as any equipment

This is yet another step in the right direction to attract investments in managing road assets as well as encouraging continuing interest of private players in the highway construction sector. While EPC projects are the most popular projects to be bid by private construction companies, HAM too has been encouraging to the established players as the risk is not entirely theirs & the awarding agency is also a stakeholder,



partly financing the project.

Since infrastructure funding is challenging even in the best of times due to long gestation periods for returns to start accruing, InvITS is an interesting, much needed impetus for encouraging / incentivizing private sector participation in the road construction sector. However, as no investment is risk-free, the manner in which it progresses in the next few years would be closely watched / monitored by other potential players.

Do you feel used machinery (second-hand equipment/refurbished equipment) market is getting importance in the current scenario to reduce the capital cost of road projects?

Depending on the segment, second-hand / refurbished equipment can have a limited impact in reducing capex for road projects. However, for crushing equipment, most road contractors prefer buying new equipment, production of aggregate / sand being one of the core activities in the project.

However, one of the means by which some road contractors are minimizing their exposure to having crushing & screening

equipment in their assets is sourcing the aggregate through contract crushing. Some established / reputed road contractors have been successfully using this model for many years, thereby establishing long term relations with contract crushers.

What is your response to Government's Atmanirbhar Bharat Package 1, 2 and 3 for economic growth? Have these benefitted the company and the industry in general?

Puzzolana, from its very inception, has been a strong believer of #MakeInIndia & #AtmaNirbharBharat with the setting up of an in-house design / R&D centre where new products are conceived & designed. With regular feedback from service engineering & customers, Puzzolana constantly improves existing equipment / plant designs. These are critical for equipment / plant performance and ease of maintenance.

Complementing the design / R&D team are state-of-the-art in-house five major manufacturing facilities in Hyderabad & a large casting facility in Dharwad. Atmanirbhar Bharat has been an ethos with the organization that has made it the largest manufacturer of crushing & screening plants in the country.

How does Puzzolana plan to address carbon neutrality in the coming years? Please tell us more about your sustainability-led initiatives.

Puzzolana is proud to state that we were the pioneers in manufacturing the country's first mobile crushing & screening plants that can run on grid power. These hybrid models also have diesel generator sets as a standard fitment, where in the event of a grid failure, the machines can be restarted with the genset quickly by operating the changeover switch.

By connecting to the grid, the plant operator can avoid the challenges of managing large quantities of diesel in terms of paper work, transportation, storage & safety. This pioneering step has been a major attraction to customers who have appreciated the immense benefits that can be derived by using grid power, besides the low cost of production.

Puzzolana, a home grown, indigenous organization, believes in continually improving the design & performance of their crushing equipment & the last few months have been no different

