

## 'We are seeing smarter utilisation of need-based automation'

**Anbu Varathan,  
Director General &  
CEO, Indian Machine  
Tool Manufacturers'  
Association (IMTMA)  
and Bangalore  
International  
Exhibition Centre  
(BIEC).**

**How was the response of the industry during the IMTEX Connect virtual event, especially now that the pandemic appears to be under control?**

IMTEX Connect 2021 successfully brought the machine tool industry and user industries together on the digital platform. This digital initiative enabled exhibitors to present their products and enabled them to interact with visitors successfully.

IMTMA organised this unique show in response to the pandemic that had restricted physical meeting opportunities momentarily. The digital platform successfully bridged the void created in business transactions, renewed acquaintances and created new ones. IMTEX Connect was an excellent platform for manufacturers to showcase products and technology and share knowledge ahead of the main show scheduled in June this year.

The exhibition drew a good response from stakeholders across the world. The event featured over 90 exhibitors and more than 7000 visitors from 45 countries. The feedback from



Anbu Varathan, DG & CEO, IMTMA and BIEC



**IMTMA organises IMTEX series of exhibitions**

exhibitors has been impressive and many were satisfied with the outcome and network opportunities that they availed.

User industries connected with latest innovations in 3D printing and Industry 4.0 concepts.

**What is the impact of the pandemic on the manufacturing industry and how has the Budget 2021 addressed the concerns?**

The Machine Tool industry, which is the backbone of the manufacturing sector, faced challenges during the lockdown period with around 70% of business being affected in the first quarter of FY 2020-2021. Gradually in the unlock phase industries began reporting encouraging sales and orders and we may see growth rate coming back to pre-Covid levels by the mid of CY 2021. Emergency credit line guarantee schemes, large cap allocation for MSMEs, production linked incentives in auto and electronics, redefinition of MSMEs, increase in budget outlays for machine tool user sectors are expected to help the machine tool industry business. Also preference for local manufacturers in public procurement, measures for ease of doing business, incentives for start-ups, NRF allocation for propelling technology development and Atmanirbhar and Make in India initiatives are expected to address

business concerns over short to medium-term.

**The pandemic has re-emphasised the need for more automation and greater adoption of Industry 4.0 concepts. Is the machine tool industry ready for this?**

Undoubtedly the pandemic has brought changes in the way of office functioning with companies experimenting with 'work from home' wherever possible. We are also seeing smarter utilisation of need-based automation across the entire spectrum of the manufacturing ecosystem. Further, we are seeing digitalisation of shop floor arena and allied areas, mostly customised for enhancing efficiency and cost competitiveness.

**How is the industry coming to terms with the fact that there has been no physical event during this period which is the main point of contact with customers?**

The pandemic has perhaps reaffirmed the adage that change is constant and evolution is inevitable. Interface between exhibitors and visitors on the digital mode has become an add-on for what was being done face-to-face. Artificial intelligence, virtual reality, augmented reality, data analytics, etc., are gaining momentum and finding wider applications including usage in exhibitions.

**The industry is still wary about the holding of actual (physical) events. How about the logistics of handling a major event like IMTEX in June?**

With vaccines and SOPs in place, industry is no more wary of organising physical events anymore. Exhibition organisers are preparing to move ahead with their planned shows and venues are also gearing up to welcome them. IMTEX & Tooltech 2021 will be one of the first major exhibitions to be held since the outbreak of the pandemic and will set the tone for others to follow.

**What is the new normal for exhibitors and event organisers?**

All of us are going through the learning curve, be it exhibitors, visitors or show organisers. Technology is bringing value propositions to shows by helping visitors explore and understand more about the products before they visit the venue so that they spend quality time at the expo. This may lead to better business outcomes among exhibitors. Also exhibition industry stakeholders will be focusing on safety and hygiene aspects while organising shows. People unable to travel can explore hybrid formats at physical exhibitions in accessible product/service categories and gain insight into the products and technologies on offer.

*Anbu Varathan is a Metallurgical Engineer from Indian Institute of Science, Bangalore and has working experience of about 30 years. At present he is the Director General & CEO of Indian Machine Tool Manufacturers' Association (IMTMA) - the apex industry association for the machine tool sector in India. He is also the Chief Executive Officer of Bangalore International Exhibition Centre (BIEC). BIEC is a 'Centre of Excellence' established by IMTMA with Exhibition & Conference facilities of the highest quality at par with international standards and is certified as 'Green' project as per LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) standards of US Green Building Council (USGBC) and by Indian Green Building Council (IGBC).*