



# Up Close and Personal

With B.R. Mehta,  
Sr. Vice-president, Reliance



**B. R MEHTA, (SR.VICE-PRESIDENT RELIANCE),** HAS BEEN WITH THE RELIANCE GROUP FROM 1985. IN A RICH AND HIGHLY SUCCESSFUL CAREER SPANNING OVER THREE DECADES, HE HAS WORKED FROM THE CONCEPT TO THE COMMISSIONING OF MANY SUCCESSFUL PROJECTS IN THE FIELD OF CONTROL SYSTEMS AND INSTRUMENTATION AT THE PATALGANGA, HAZIRA PHASE I, HAZIRA PHASE II, TFIL AND JAMNAGAR REFINING AND PETROCHEMICALS COMPLEXES. THE STATE-OF-THE-ART REFINERY AT JAMNAGAR IS A PRIME EXAMPLE OF THE SUCCESSFUL INTEGRATION AND IMPLEMENTATION OF THE LATEST AUTOMATION AND CONTROL TECHNOLOGIES IN VOGUE.

HE IS CURRENTLY HEADING THE DESIGN & ENGINEERING DEPARTMENT IN THE FIELD OF CONTROL SYSTEMS & INSTRUMENTATION. DURING THIS PERIOD HE HAS WORKED WITH MANY OVERSEAS LICENSORS LIKE U.O.P, FOSTER WHEELER, ICI, UNION CARBIDE, DU PONT, STORK, STONE & WEBSTER; DETAILED ENGINEERING CONTRACTORS LIKE BECHTEL, JOHN BROWN, LUMMUS, JACOBS H & G , LUCKY ENGINEERING, CHEMTEX, WORLEY, AKER KVAERNER & MANY VENDORS. HE HAS WORKED ON BASIC ENGINEERING, DETAILED ENGINEERING, PROCUREMENT, INSPECTION, EXPEDITING, CONSTRUCTION, TESTING, PRE-COMMISSIONING & COMMISSIONING OF VARIOUS PETROCHEMICALS, CHEMICALS, CO-GENERATION POWER & REFINERY PROJECTS.

BEFORE JOINING RELIANCE, MEHTA SPENT TWO YEARS AT THE AGRO CHEMICAL & FOOD CO. IN KENYA AS CHIEF INSTRUMENTATION ENGINEER, AND 11 YEARS AT INDIAN PETROCHEMICALS LTD. IN VADODARA, INDIA, AS AN INSTRUMENTATION ENGINEER. MEHTA IS ELECTED AS CHAIRMAN OF THE FIELDBUS FOUNDATION INDIA END USER COUNCIL (FFIMC) AND IS A MEMBER OF THE FOUNDATION'S END USER ADVISORY COUNCIL (EUAC) WORLDWIDE. HE HAS BEEN CHAIRMAN OF THE INSTRUMENTATION EXPERTS CLUB IN MUMBAI, INDIA, FROM THE DATE OF ITS INCEPTION FOR THE PAST SEVEN YEARS, AND IS ALSO THE CHAIRPERSON FOR INDIA CUSTOMER ADVISORY COUNCIL OF HONEYWELL AUTOMATION INDIA LIMITED. HE ALSO PERFORMED THE KEY ROLE OF BOARD OF GOVERNOR FOR AUTOMATION 2002, 2004, 2006 & 2008 AND HAS BEEN NOMINATED AS CHAIRMAN OF BOARD OF GOVERNOR FOR AUTOMATION 2010.

**W**e interviewed him in two sessions: one work-related and the other to get to know the man. In the work-related interview, Mehta pointed out that until a few years ago the instrumentation industry was quite independent from the impact of changes in microprocessor technology. But, recently, the IT impact has triggered off a paradigm shift in the field of control and instrumentation. "There is a definite shift from analogue to digital communication and from proprietary to open system architecture in case of control systems. The latest advancements in embedded technology have enabled remote monitoring and control through Internet and intranet."

**The challenges were many and the ambition as great as it was worthwhile. In the new refinery in Jamnagar, the aim was to use automation technology to create next generation control systems using the rich intelligence property of the refining process and the latest in technology to achieve operational excellence without parallel in the world. Reliance embarked on the project and succeeded.**

Mehta firmly believes that Indian industry is moving towards a knowledge-based economy. "With the developments in IT, open networks, Internet, etc automation systems will have a high level of interface with IT systems for global competitiveness, supply-chain management, producer-consumer interface, quality, and market de-



mands,” he says. “Perhaps the greatest advantage of using open technology,” he adds, “is that users are free to choose the best product (hardware or software) to solve a given problem independent of suppliers.”

Reliance built the world’s most modern refinery in the late 1990s and operated it most efficiently over

**The top 10 risks in today’s environment can be classified as: deepening recession; credit crunch; security; energy cost; green effect (environment protection); managing talents (work force: separation, aging, development); regulatory compliance (for older plants); non-traditional entrants; cost cutting; and reputation risk.**



the last 10 years accumulating huge domain knowledge and operational expertise. When the Reliance management decided to build a new refinery in Jamnagar under Reliance Petroleum Ltd., the aim of the automation technology was to create next-generation control systems using the rich intelligence property of the refining process and the latest in technology to achieve operational excellence without parallel.

The mission of the automation, says Mehta, was to provide: • Operational excellence in monitoring, controlling, and managing the process and the business • Optimum level of integration between process control, operation support, and business support systems and • Showcase the corporate image of Reliance Industries providing next-generation control systems.

The prime objectives while designing these control systems, he adds, were independent start-up/shutdown of each unit/plant, and high plant availability. Simple and efficient plant operation ensuring operating personnel and plant safety as also system security from unauthorised changes was another issue that was considered. Efforts were made to make the system user-friendly with fast and accurate analysis, while also achieving systematic and planned scheduling and management of product and resources with a ‘look ahead’ approach for future needs.

The new refinery, with a capacity of 580,000 barrels-per-day (bpd), together with Reliance’s neighbouring 660,000 bpd existing refinery, form the world’s largest refining complex with a 1.24 million bpd capacity. With the commissioning of the new refinery, Jamnagar becomes the “refining hub” of the world.

After the successful commissioning of the new refinery, Reliance will focus on achieving the highest

standards of safety and reliability at the facility. The refinery was designed keeping in mind changing crude and product dynamics. Therefore, it has the inherent capability of delivering superior returns even in challenging market conditions. The new Jamnagar refinery deploys the latest state-of-the-art technologies. This is the largest project in India to implement Fieldbus Foundation technology having more than 13,000 devices & 3,600 segments. It also connects 1200 temperature Multiplexers on the Fieldbus.

When asked what Reliance’s key considerations were in selecting FOUNDATION technology, Mehta noted that they looked at three major aspects in the selection of automation technology for JERP. These included • Future of process automation • Proven technology and • Openness. He adds, “Our team of experts from operation, maintenance, and projects visited all major DCS vendor tech laboratories as well as various sites in China. We had

**We should focus on developments in the areas of Wireless technology in the process plant, RFID, Bio Technology, Nano technology, Embedded intelligence & diagnostics, Security of systems, Alternate energy sources (like Solar & Hydrogen as fuel). Success will come to the companies which understand how to combine and coordinate new technology, new thinking, and the deployment of effective solutions for customers. Focus has to be on constant innovations and prioritisations.**



I recall the saying of the Founder Chairman of Reliance, Shri Dhirubhai Ambani “Pursue your goal, even in the face of difficulties. Convert difficulties into opportunities. Keep your morale high, in spite of setbacks. At the end you are bound to succeed.”

references from other large end-users like Shell in terms of technology advancement. Based on feedback from our supplier visits and references, as well as the experience of other major users, we concluded that FOUNDATION Fieldbus technology is well proven. We also learned that this technology is non-proprietary, open, and interoperable, and involves continuous vendor innovation. The infrastructure is neutral and standards-based, and provides end-users with a common framework to implement and manage the latest advanced control strategies. We also considered the market availability of Fieldbus devices and products.”

To get away from his remarkable professional achievements and to befriend the true persona of the man who wears so many different hats with such aplomb, we spent time with Mehta at his Navi Mumbai residence. Simple, humble and affable, he is also a considerate host. Married to the effervescent and charming Dina for the last 31 years, they have two children who are also instrumentation engineers. The son, the eldest, works in London, and the daughter is in Mumbai. He will soon complete 25 years with Reliance.

How did it all begin? we ask. You have an enviable career profile – what is the secret of your success?



Does he have a secret mantra? “It wasn’t all that difficult,” says Mehta simply. “My father was an engineer and I knew from the beginning where I was headed. In fact, from as early as the eighth standard, I knew I would be an engineer. Father was a mechanical engineer and I was interested in instrumentation. That was the only difference. I was also a good student, was fifth in Gujarat University, and that helped.”

Does he attribute his success to destiny or to hard work? “Just hard work, no question about it. There is no substitute to hard work,” retorts Mehta reaffirming an age old work credo. “Corporate work culture is result oriented and hard work pays. Of course, there is always an element of luck in life.”

In a high profile career, Mehta admits to a lot of work related travel and so fixed schedules are out of the question. “But I generally wake up at around 7 and am in office by 10. The work day can stretch to ten hours or more.” There are no such things as holidays, he adds, “Because I also work from home.” He is not unduly ritualistic but likes to start the day with prayer. A vegetarian and a non

smoker, he admits to doing a little exercise everyday to keep fit. He de-stresses by reading, watching sport, especially cricket, and travel. Family get-togethers also help.

Over this long journey, Mehta insists that he can’t pinpoint any single source of inspiration, be it a book, a person or an event as there have been several factors that have influenced and inspired him in life. But he has always had Dina’s unadulterated support during tough times and, professionally, has always had the support of his engineers. “My engineers are very good. They are my support system. I have immense faith in my subordinates,” he confesses. “You see, all private companies are hard taskmasters and we have to deliver in time. We are on our toes. I have trained close to 500 engineers, and the idea is never to sack someone but train the person to be able to cope with the situation. There is a lot of hands-on work and we are free and have the authority to take decisions on the ground. Some decisions can be very tough but we take the call. Commercial decisions are decided by the highest management. I also believe that the loyalty factor is also appreciated. So, I guess, if you work hard and with commitment, you will bear results over a period of time.”

About the future, Mehta, who is pragmatic, has his feet firmly on the ground, and is not prone to fantasies. “Let me take one day at a time. I will continue for a few years and see how it goes. But, most definitely, a book on engineering is on the cards. I am working on it. It takes time to write a book.”

He also feels that the prosperity of Reliance will percolate to most of India slowly and that Reliance will also be a global brand soon. The success of Reliance, he admits, lies in “foresight and the fast implementation of projects. We believe that nothing is impossible.” **IA**