

Profile of India as a manufacturing country is on the rise

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Our Bureau

India is the second largest country, after the US, in terms of number of employees for industrial automation company Rockwell Automation.

Rockwell's products serve a broad spectrum of industries such as food and beverage, home and personal care, life sciences and pharmaceuticals, oil and gas, mining, cement and chemicals. Semiconductors and data centres are new industries that Rockwell hopes to serve.

In addition, Rockwell has its own version of GCCs, which it calls Centres of Excellence, in Noida, Pune, Bengaluru and Chennai which cater to automotive and tyres, pharma and life sciences, and consumer products.

In this recent interview with correspondents from India, including *businessline*, on the sidelines of the

Rockwell Automation Fair 2025 in Chicago, Dilip Sawhney, Managing Director, Rockwell Automation India, says that the country is playing a core and central role in most of its global operations whether through design and development or in its manufacturing footprint.

Edited excerpts:

As the India head of a US multinational, what are you hearing from your peers in gatherings like the Automation Fair about India?

I think the profile of India as a manufacturing country is on the rise. Pharmaceutical companies have, for a long period of time now, been making investments globally, but increasingly we are finding that even machinery builders are coming in from India because they've solved the problems in India and the same problems need to be solved elsewhere. And they're gaining scale, they're making themselves globally relevant. And it is being noticed. We have account leads sitting here in

the US that are working with companies in Mumbai, and those companies are making manufacturing investments here in this country, and we're just supporting them in real time. It is still not a very pronounced trend, but it is much more frequent than what it used to be.

Is industrial automation growing at the cost of labour, especially in India where cheap labour is abundant?

You must unpack that question a little bit. It'll be oversimplifying to state that you want to deploy automation to do away with people. You want to deploy automation to tackle deep complexity that today confronts a range of manufacturers. What is the complexity? It's at several levels. You know, there's complexity because first of all, it's not only having people, it's having people who have the right level of skills to work on a particular machine.

Now, what is happening in India is really no different from mature markets like the

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DILIP SAWHNEY

MD, Rockwell Automation India



US or Europe in that increasingly, the retiring workforce is being replaced by people who barely have any exposure to manufacturing. And the knowledge of someone who's worked on a machine for 20 years is totally unavailable to someone that you just picked off the street. Automation actually allows you to de-skill that job so that someone who's got much lesser experience can actually do that role. It also makes it easier for you to cross-train a person in a fraction of the time by using techniques which are enabled, powered by digital innovation.

But does that take away

Rockwell Automation India MD

little bit less complex so that it can be scaled up. And then you have to solve that manufacturing problem at the scale of India, which is significant. So it's complex calculus.

You want to do two kinds of manufacturing. One, manufacturing textiles, footwear, etc., where you can absorb a whole lot of people who are coming fresh into the workforce. But India also wants to play in advanced manufacturing. Those are really the industries that are going to be really taking us up the value curve. But those are brand new industries altogether.

Where are the people who are skilled to work in those industries? Those jobs have not really existed and you just cannot create that talent pool fast enough. And automation really is a critical link in making people ready fast enough by cross-training them and also by making the jobs a little

your new plant in Chennai?

It's getting close to commissioning now. We already have a running factory in Chennai, where we produce modular enclosures. And the new factory, which is being built, it's a green-field that will produce equipments that are going to be dedicated for semiconductor industry.

They are going to be utilised to power process tools that go inside semiconductor fabs. So that's one area which we are particularly excited about. There's a very high demand for the modular enclosures from new-age industries like renewables and data centres.

The second new factory that we are building is going to be dedicated for modular enclosures again. The factory in Chennai was the first time we, as a company, were doing a green-field after a number of years. So it's a very contem-

being set up and also the big investments in semiconductors?

Part of it was because there was growing demand, data centres and renewables in particular. Part of it also is our technology is well suited for these two industries. And for process tools in the semiconductor fabs area, that is a part of our resiliency efforts.

We felt that we needed to build, we had manufacturing capacity, but we wanted to augment that from a resiliency standpoint. And that was in part the reason why we set up a factory in India.

a skilled job?

There's a whole dialogue that needs to happen around the future of jobs themselves. We are seeing brand new industries such as green hydrogen and electric vehicles, which require a whole new range of manufacturing to happen.

You just don't have enough manufacturing capacity for large-scale green hydrogen electrolyzers. Where are you going to get people who are skilled to build those electrolyzers? Those people don't exist, you really just must skill