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Employees spelling the Mtandt logo

A PASSAGE TO INDIA

In late May, Cranes & Access' Imogen Campion visited India in order to gain an insight into the developments in the crane, aerial lift and telehandler markets. She began with a visit to Mtandt Group in Greater Noida, south east of New Delhi, one of the country's pioneering sales and rental companies which is benefiting from India's rapidly developing powered access industry.

BACKGROUND AND PERSPECTIVE

India has recently overtaken China as the world's most populous country, with more than 1.4 billion citizens in an area six times the size of France and nine times the size of Germany. Yet it is estimated that there are only 10,000 aerial work platforms available to rent with a further 4,000 units owned by end users. Around 3,000 of these are said to have arrived last year - 1,000 of them new and 2,000 second hand machines. If these numbers are accurate - or even close to reality - the aerial lift population will have grown more than 30 percent in 2023, however there is huge expansion potential.

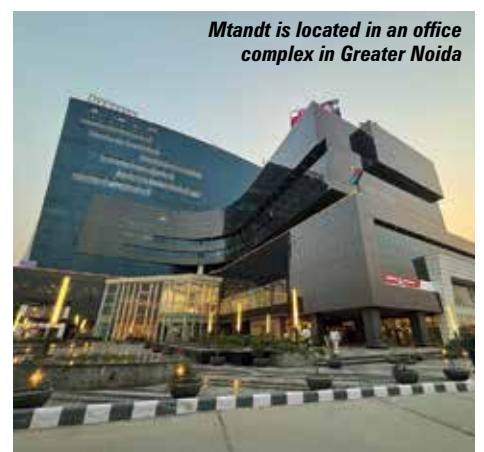
Current figures suggest there is one aerial work platform per 100,000 people or one rental machine per 140,000. Compare that to the United States and the figure is well over 200 per 100,000, Europe's figure is now more than 100, while China has grown rapidly from a similar level to India in 2020 to around six per 100,000 in 2024. Having said all this, a major factor in market development is GDP per capita and here India is way down the list at 136th with about \$2,500 per head compared to China at \$12,000 and the USA at \$70,000. But with annual GDP growth in the region of eight to nine percent things are changing.



Imogen Campion with Rakesh Modi

SPREADING THE WORD

Mtandt chairman Rakesh Modi joined the company in 1984 and is passionate about the business. Speaking about the local market challenges he says: "The biggest challenge in India is not the price, it's the awareness. Knowledge about aerial work platforms is very minimal, 80 percent of the potential customers still don't know anything about scissor or boom lifts. They don't see how fast, convenient and safe work platforms can be, and yet the chances are



Mtandt is located in an office complex in Greater Noida

that when the people that need them start using them, they won't go back to their old ways. There are 1.4 billion people in India, statistically the market is here, even government organisations don't realise their potential."

Traditional methods of construction are still widely used within the country, and often those methods are very unsafe and impractical. "The first task is raising awareness, the second is having the availability in terms of machines. We are planning to add 1,000 machines this year

which is still only a drop in the ocean compared to the size of the country," says Modi.

"India is growing in a very sustainable manner. Unlike other countries that grew very fast, India grows at a slow, healthy pace, it's so huge that even slow is big. We also want to make work at height safer and more efficient as the industry grows."

"INDIA IS PROBABLY THE CHEAPEST PLACE"

There are currently around 200 rental companies across India with Mtandt claiming a 10 percent share of aerial work platform market and a 28 percent share in Chennai in the south east where the company is based. "India is probably the cheapest place in the whole world to rent scissors and booms, we are 25 to 30 percent cheaper than in China. I would say that on average the cost of renting a 30 metre boom is around \$1,000 a month, and a 12 metre scissor approximately \$300 a month."

Mtandt is growing fast, as highlighted by a \$30 million order placed with Dingli in the first week of May, with machines being delivered over the next six months. The order includes 600 machines, of which around 500 are earmarked for the rental fleet and 100 for sales inventory. The company expects to place another order later this summer.

GOING INTERNATIONAL

In addition to its operations in India and Sri Lanka, Mtandt has dipped its toe in the UK market with the purchase of Web Systems International in Edinburgh, Scotland in 2020. The company produces under-deck access and netting solutions for installation under bridges, piers and oil rigs etc to improve safety and productivity of those working under decks or in other exposed high points. It has also opened a new subsidiary called Vertikal - no, nothing to do with the owner of Cranes & Access - as part of its expansion into tower crane sales and rental having signed a distribution deal with Spanish manufacturer Comansa. The distribution of cranes with capacities between 10 and 25 tonnes will officially begin in January however the company has already taken delivery of eight units with 12 more planned before the end of the year.



Shivani Aggarwal in digital marketing



Divisions of the Mtandt Group



A GROWING DISTRIBUTION BUSINESS

During the visit the company also confirmed its appointment as distributor for Italian truck mount manufacturer Comet which it distributes across the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) region. It also represents Dingli, CMC, Falcon and Hoeflon in India.

SAFETY AND TRAINING

The company has been a major advocate for the safe operation of equipment. The National Institute of Technology Surat and IIT Delhi found that 11,614 people die each year in India's construction industry, and this maybe far

higher with some incidents going unreported. Consequently, the company founded CESL (Capital Equipment Services Limited) to provide safety training for aerial work platforms and for work at height in industrial environments.

Sanjay Verma is managing director of the training business and having been with the company for seven years, he said: "Mtandt is trying to get a mandate from the government to ensure that anyone who is using an aerial work platform will need a license. I am hopeful that by July we will begin to make real progress and have the mandate in place soon afterwards."

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"In the UK and other European countries work at height requires training, and that is what we need here. Mtandt's philosophy is a safe world, safe operator and a safe working environment. We provide safety solutions for working at height. There are plenty of institutes which offer crash courses when it comes to work platforms in India, but they are not accredited. You can count the number of certified institutes on one hand. The country turns a blind eye to the fact that anyone can operate aerial work platforms."

"We already have a training centre in Chennai and with this year's expansion plans, we will hopefully be able to add satellite training centres in all the major zones of the country, we are also looking at 'train the trainer' programmes."

50 YEARS IN BUSINESS

Mtandt can trace its roots back to 1974 when Rakesh's father Rajkumar Modi established 'Madras Tools and Tackle' as a hardware store, evolving into Mtandt as the business grew.



Rajkumar Modi

"Two members of our current staff have been part of the company since the very beginning" says Modi. "Everyone knows them as the 'owners of Mtandt', as they are the real power and the authority."

In 1985, the company introduced aluminium scaffold systems to the country and opened a manufacturing facility in Chennai. In 1995 it made further strides by purchasing its first scissor lift - a Skyjack SJ3380 - which cost \$500 and subsequently launched an aerial platform division.

The company transitioned from a proprietorship to a public limited company in 2005 and five years later launched the 'Academy of Safe Work Practices' - now known as CESL Training - to provide rope and access training for operators and engineers, and inaugurated its current headquarters in Padur, Chennai.

In 2012, it expanded its product range to include telehandlers, suspended platforms and truck mounted cranes, going online with maintenance, tools and supplies in 2014. CESL was formed in 2015, with CESL Training adding aerial work platform training in 2021.

International expansion began in 2017 when it branched out into Sri Lanka and then Qatar the following year as it expanded its aluminium scaffold manufacturing operations. WEB Systems International came in 2020, followed by the

new facility in Jewar in Uttar Pradesh in 2023. Plans are on the drawing board to expand into Bangladesh later this year.

"WE WERE JUST LUCKY"

Speaking of business principles and people management Modi says: "I believe that the most important element to running a successful company is the happiness of those working in the team. We have even introduced a 'No firing' policy. If you take care of your people, they'll take care of you. You have to create that culture and we will all grow together. This year all our 1,000 employees will become shareholders, we want to share our wealth with our people."

"If anyone asks what makes us successful, I tell them that we are just lucky. We found the best people to work for us, we found the best customers, we found the best vendors and we found the best media to cover us. We are all about our people, we want to provide happiness by inspiring enthusiasm and optimism."

LIFE IS FOR LIVING

"Life is not about making money, it is about living. For my father making more money wasn't important. He wanted quality time with family and relatives and have just enough time for the business. I never saw him unhappy, he'd always be smiling. He would say 'we live a king-sized life'." ■