



**INTERVIEW: NEERAJ GUPTA**

**MANAGING DIRECTOR & CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER, MKU (P) LTD**

# ‘R&D keeps us technologically ahead of the curve’

*MKU, setup in 1985, has pioneered the advent of light weight armouring solutions in India and has provided protective gears to over 1.5 million soldiers and over 1,500 platforms, including land vehicles, aircraft and naval vessels. It has also developed over 1,000 solutions, used by 230 armed forces in more than 100 countries. In an interview, Neeraj Gupta, MD & CEO, MKU (P) Ltd, tells FE's Huma Siddiqui about the company's offerings and the road ahead. Excerpts:*

**What are the key strengths of MKU?**

MKU's infrastructure spans two units in India and one in Germany. Together, these units have a capacity to produce over 200,000 helmets, 150,000 ballistic jackets and 300,000 armour inserts for defence and security personnel. We can manufacture 72,000 sq m of armour panels annually for platforms. MKU is a registered NATO supplier and has certified quality management systems conforming to ISO 9001-2008 and AS-9100-2009. MKU, thanks to its global exposure, has acquired a keen understanding of the ground situations, environmental conditions and threat scenarios faced by soldiers and law enforcement personnel. This enables us to offer custom solutions. We offer various ballistic packages, including soft and hard armour that is NIJ J0101.06 certified by the National Institute of Justice, US. This kind of certification is issued only after stringent testing.

**What kind of opportunities are there for MSMEs in the defence sector?**

MSMEs can play an important role in the defence sector. They can complement the large industries by providing them a host of supplementary products and even critical technological components. We have the experience of the auto industry in India and how from being ancillaries to the auto manufacturers, the auto compo-

nent manufacturers have today carved out a place for themselves in the global market.

**How easy or difficult is it for an SME to get into this field?**

It is not easy for an SME to get into this sector. Their biggest barrier is technology. The lack of infrastructure for R&D and a less than proactive government policy act as major impediments. The initiative, drive and competence are certainly there, and given a reasonable government support SMEs would certainly make a mark for themselves in this field. Indian enterprise has always faced up to the challenges and this is no exception.

**How much weightage do you give to R&D in your company?**

R&D plays a very important part in keeping the company technologically ahead of the curve. It is very important to be abreast of the technological advances in the field for a company to be globally competitive. We at MKU understand this very well. Our R&D spend is almost 45% of our turnover. We have gone ahead and started a Technology Development Centre in Kanpur recently to focus more on product and technology development.

**How do you plan to grow your international footprint?**

At MKU exports play a key role in our overall business plans. Over the years, we have gone out into the world and through participation in international events and other ventures we have been able to establish an international presence. We have been able to provide technologically acceptable products to our clients. We intend to continue to do so and tap hitherto untapped and newer markets to expand our reach globally.

**What kind of products your company specialises in?**

MKU offers expert solutions in pro-

tection and surveillance. We offer light weight body armour, ballistic helmets, ballistic shields, de-mining suits, bomb blankets for army and law enforcement personnel. We also offer light weight precision cut composite panels & kits for armouring of land, air and sea platforms. Complete project management, including design, prototyping, manufacturing and integration of the armour onto the platforms, is also offered.

We have developed innovative solutions and product lines. Instavest from MKU is one example. The 'quick release jacket' features an innovative design that allows it to be divested from the body with a single fluid action. It can be put on back in seconds. This feature is in growing demand globally and is required in extreme situations faced by the soldiers. The 'boltfree' technology employed by MKU in manufacturing its range of ballistic helmets is unique as the absence of bolts inside on the helmet eliminates the risk of injuries due to secondary fragmentation.

**What are your strategies towards securing a larger share of the Indian defence market?**

In the last couple of years there has been a paradigm shift in India's security focus. More attention is being paid to threat from asymmetric warfare. It has been realised that the security has to be beefed up against internal threats. This has been reflected in the considerable increase in India's internal security budget. We are uniquely positioned to take advantage of this strategic shift and have over the years invested in technology and equipment to provide best in class equipment and protection solutions. With the latest technological and R&D facilities in India and Germany, a state-of-the-art ballistic lab and over 1,000 proven solutions, MKU remains ahead of the technological curve in terms of quality and price.