

# 'A good leader should be a day dreamer'

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**H**e is nearing 70, but Onkar S Kanwar, chairman Apollo Tyres, is like his company — fitter than ever before. Operating in an industry beset with old technology and archaic business ethos, he has successfully managed to steer the company to the position of India's first global tyre manufacturer, with two overseas acquisitions — South Africa's Dunlop in 2006 and the Dutch Vredestein in 2009. As he says, leaders should lead from the front. Excerpts:

## How do you define a leader?

A good leader has to be a visionary. He should be able to define the vision clearly, strategically and motivate people towards achieving it. He also has to lead from the front. The critical thing is that he should be able to get his people excited about his ideas so that they give more than 100%.

## What are the three most important traits of a leader?

There are certain basic values that are a must. Top of the list is the abili-

ty to communicate directly, efficiently and unambiguously. He also should have basic integrity so that nobody can point fingers at him at any given point in time. Also, he should be transparent and not scheming.

## As the head of the ₹10,000-crore Apollo group, how do you cultivate leaders?

I have always believed that my people are more important than anything else. They are my true assets. One of our greatest success is that we work as a team where goals are shared. We invest in people and make them part of the decision-making process. There is responsibility on them and that makes them leaders in their field.

## What is the role of a professional in a promoter-driven company like Apollo?

I am not driving the company. Only overseeing it and conducting board meetings. It is driven by our 16,000 employees across 3 continents and rightly so. Almost 54% of this firm is owned by FIIs and banks and I am answerable to them. Apollo tyres is not run on the basis of my whims and fancies but thorough professionals who take smart decisions. I always used this chair as a trustee. Within

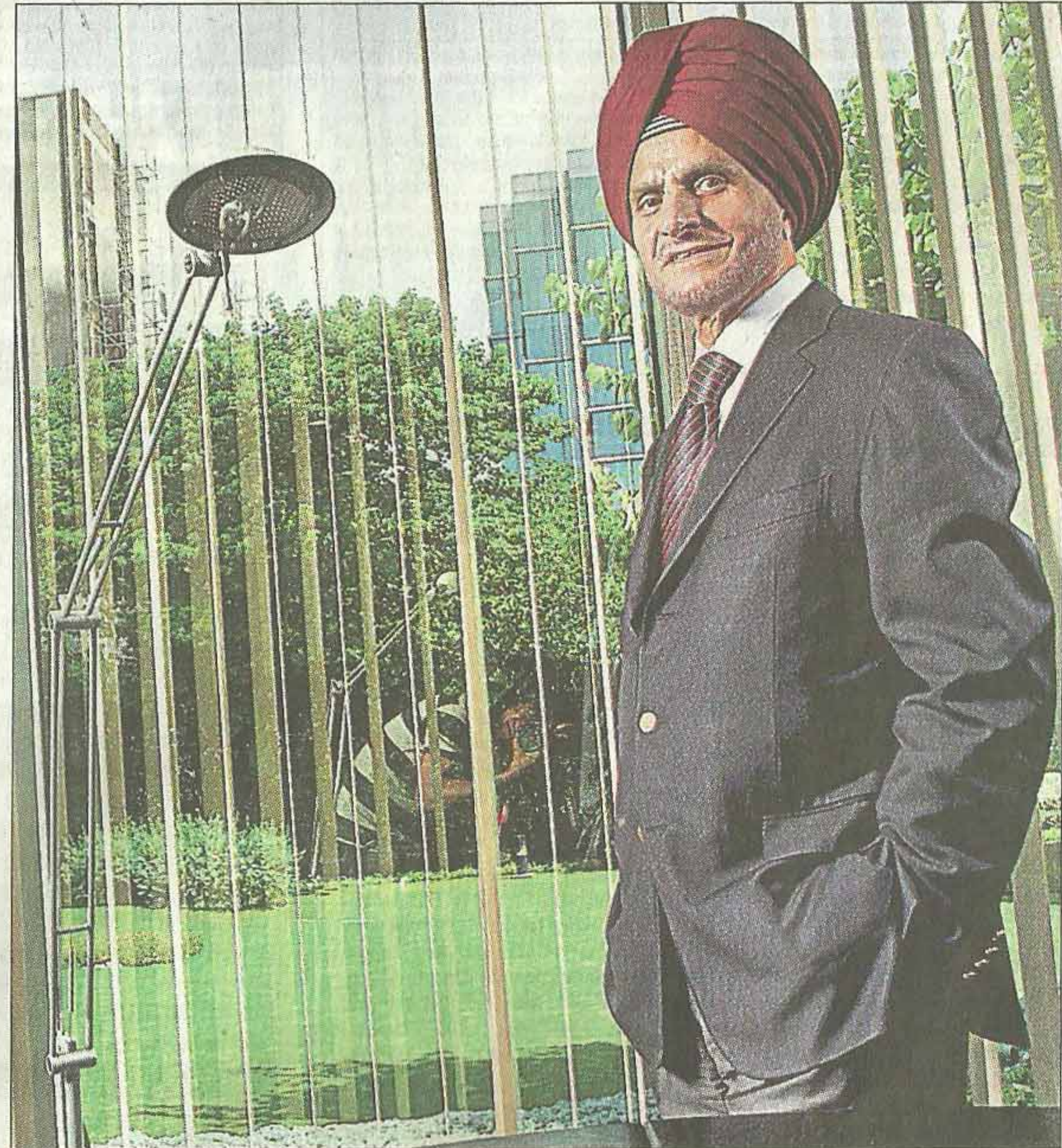
the company, people have been promoted and treated on merit. That explains why the attrition rate among senior professionals at Apollo is zero.

## What is the role of a leader at a time when macro-economic indicators are uncertain and growth cannot be taken for granted?

I think it is only in these times that you can differentiate a good leader from an average one. When the going is good then it is relatively easy and everybody is growing. But when times are tough that is when one needs to show courage and innovate. Every crisis presents an opportunity and a good leader is excited by it. We at Apollo are very bullish and it gives us extra motivation to keep growing in a challenging market.

## What is more desirable, a charismatic larger-than-life leader or a low profile one?

Both are necessary. There has to be a balance. What is more important is that one should be a day dreamer. Dreams in the night are of no use. One should have dreams during the day so that you can think out-of-the-box and act on it. Whether it is with charisma or by quietly working, is irrespective.



■ Kanwar says 16,000 employees drive the company across 3 continents and he prefers using the chair as a trustee.