

Family in
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THE ECONOMIC TIMES

ET Panache

Team for a dream

Metal heavyweights Bharat Forge recently changed into cleats, as it were, and floated a football club. Amit Kalyani, executive director of the Kalyani Group, shares his plans for the sport and also reveals a bit of Kalyani – the husband, father and saxophonist

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For a company that's the world's largest auto-component manufacturing group with diversified interests, the Kalyani Group's setting up of a football club seems unusual. Yet, at closer inspection, it matches the company's ethos. "Team before self and nation above all".

At the Bharat Forge headquarters in Pune, Amit B Kalyani, executive director, Kalyani Group, is matter of fact about creating the football club Bharat FC. "Team sports build character. Team working is what our country needs," Kalyani says, sitting on a sofa in his meeting room.

In this exclusive interview with ET Panache, he also speaks about the art of managing people, creating 'mini leaders' and being a family man. An excerpt:

Kalyani Group recently established a football team. What attracted you to football?

I experienced the magic of football in school, where it was the sport. I was a tennis player and not a footballer. But I reconnected with football because of my 11-year-old son. He goes for football coaching and is into it.

Football is the world's most watched sport and India is one of the World Cup's largest TV viewerships. Also, the sport is cheap to play. The last factor that pushed me over the edge was the closure of the Pune IPL team.

It was a loss for the city because it gave a fantastic outlet for people to rally behind their team.

We are entering our 50th year this year and we thought we should do something for Pune. I didn't want to buy an IPL team. So, we decided to build a football club and start creating a legacy that's non-industrial. It's also a great way for the Kalyani Group to connect with people. Being a B2B business, it was a great way to make our brand more tangible for the common person.

We are looking at a 20-year horizon by when we believe India will qualify for the World Cup.

Why did you not buy a team in the Indian Super League (ISL)?

I-League is the FIFA sanctioned league. It's the Division I league of India, akin to Bundesliga and the English Premier League (EPL). Clearly, that's where we wanted to play. ISL is a short-term tournament which lasts 6-8 weeks in a year and then everybody disbands. We wanted to do something which has longevity because then you can build an institute and academy



PIC: NISHIKANT GAMRE

around it. You can form U-16 and U-19 teams. You can create the whole funnel.

Which is your favourite football club?

I like Bayern Munich and I loved the way Germany played at the World Cup. What I love about German football is that it's very technical. The coaching is analytical. There is tremendous skill and charisma but it's not like one guy is better than

If someone says he's doing 20 hours of non-value added work in a week, he needs a job change. He's stagnating there. I give such people new work to do.

This improves our productivity. People were reserved initially. Now, they come to me regularly and ask for new challenges. These are people who don't report to me directly. There would be five levels between me and them. But they know that I will listen



A part from his father Baba Kalyani, Amit Kalyani (left) looks up to Ratan Tata, Anand Mahindra and Kumar Mangalam Birla

everyone else. That's the magic of teamwork.

One of your core responsibilities is managing talent. How do you ensure talent is nurtured?

I like working with people on the shop floor. I personally meet them once a month and ask them to note down the hours of non-value added work (repetitive tasks) they did that week or month.



A 22-mile cycling trip with his son across the Golden Gate bridge in San Francisco is one of Kalyani's cherished memories

to them. I feel that the charisma of a leader will only take you so far. You also need to create mini-leaders. Jack Welch created a leadership factory, so when he retired, there were five guys in the running for his job. When one was picked, the others became CEOs of Fortune 500 companies within a week

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On a personal note, when you travel alone, do you collect souvenirs or do any shopping?

I try to get something for my children. My daughters love stickers, art... I get something that's a little artsy. My older daughter loves puzzles, knitting and crochet. My younger daughter likes crayons and colouring. My son loves anything related to technology or sports. But they hate it when I travel. My youngest sulks and won't talk to me when I am abroad. My wife says my youngest daughter has me wrapped around her little finger (chuckles).

Which was the first car you drove?

It was a Gypsy. I was 16. The first long drive was a cross country one from the east coast to the west coast in the US lasting about 42 days. It was right after college and three of my friends and I decided to do a trip to see seven or eight national parks. It was on shoe string budget. We had a great time.

Amit Kalyani likes to run. He cycles, but only if the weather is pleasant

Your favourite car.

Jaguar. It's not flashy and I love to drive it. I also love Mercedes. They make fantastic cars. Even in Pune I drive whenever we go out. The driver accompanies us only to park the car.

You run every day. How do you manage to do that when you are travelling? Do you listen to music while running?

I run and cycle. But I cycle only when the weather is nice. If I was abroad, I would cycle every day. I have a Canyon carbon fibre cycle, which I ride around my house. But I run no matter where I am in the world. My wife thinks I am crazy. My father also thinks I am crazy.

Because she's worth it

On my wife's 40th birthday last March, I wanted to do something special. So two of my children and I learnt an instrument. I learnt to play 'Happy Birthday' on a saxophone in four days. She was very impressed. My older daughter played the piano, my son the guitar and my youngest sang 'Happy Birthday' on stage. We had a party at home.

