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FROM INDIA TO EGYPT – ASEPTO BUILDS A GLOBAL ASEPTIC PACKAGING POWERHOUSE



Food safety scrutiny moves deeper into the packaging supply chain



Toyo Ink's push for smarter, safer and more sustainable printing



Bobst Expert 5003 makes 600 meters per min rotogravure a reality

USD 126-MILLION PLANT ADDS 12 BILLION PACKS OF ANNUAL CAPACITY

Asepto's Egypt plant puts global supply-chain agility at the center of its next phase

MAHAN HAZARIKA

Asepto, the aseptic liquid packaging business of USD 1.63-billion UFlex, is preparing to start commercial operations at its greenfield facility at Ain Sokhna, Egypt, by the end of 2026. The USD 126-million plant is Asepto's second manufacturing base and adds 12 billion packs a year to its installed capacity, taking the combined capacity of its India and Egypt operations to 24 billion packs.

Asepto began in 2017 with no established position in aseptic packaging. Its India operation now provides 12 billion packs of annual capacity and has established an export presence spanning more than 50 countries. Ain Sokhna is the next step in that evolution: not simply a second factory, but a manufacturing and logistics platform designed to bring Asepto closer to customers across MENA, Africa, Europe and the Americas.

Around USD 108 million of the investment had been spent by June 2026, according to Ashwani Sharma, president and CEO, Asepto. Spread across 30 acres, the Ain Sokhna facility is being ramped up in phases, with utilization targeted at 30% in the first full year of commercial production, 60-70% in the second and 100% in the third.



Ashwani Sharma, president and CEO, Asepto, during the media interaction at Asepto's Ain Sokhna plant in Egypt. Photo: The Packman

EGYPT CHANGES THE SUPPLY-CHAIN EQUATION

For Asepto, however, the Egypt investment is about more than capacity addition. It changes the company's ability to serve international markets from a geographically strategic manufacturing base.

"Egypt has a very strategic location," Sharma said. From Ain Sokhna, GCC (Gulf Cooperation Council) and Middle East markets can be reached in 10 days, Africa in about five to 20 days and Europe in roughly 10 days. North America and Latin America can be served in around 30 days, and CIS (Commonwealth of Independent States) countries in about 10 days.

The logistics advantage becomes more significant when compared with Asepto's existing India-centric export model. The company already exports around 35–40% of its Indian production and serves more than 250 customers across over 50 countries. Egypt is intended to complement that network rather than displace India.

"Today, our strategic shift has changed. We have become a multi-location, global, strong global aseptic packaging powerhouse," Sharma said.

The rationale is also linked to trade access. Egypt offers duty-free access to the GCC and Europe, while its network of trade agreements provides access to a growing number of African markets. For Asepto, this combines shorter physical delivery distances

with a potentially more competitive landed cost for customers.

The opportunity is large enough to justify the geographic expansion. Sharma estimates global aseptic packaging demand at around 300 billion packs annually, with dairy, juices and beverages accounting for much of the market.

DESIGNING FOR HIGHER PRODUCTIVITY AND LOWER WASTE

The Ain Sokhna plant has been designed around the productivity requirements of the regional market. Its two 12-color Heidelberg Boardmaster flexographic presses, each 1,650 mm wide, can operate at speeds of up to 600 meters per minute, with zero-changeover downtime. The production configuration is aimed at addressing two persistent inefficiencies in packaging manufacturing: downtime and material waste during job changes.

The lines incorporate automatic wash-up during production, anilox sleeve changes during production, automatic color changes, and Heidelberg Intellimatch, a contactless offline sleeve and plate scanner. The system also enables precise measurement of printing-plate topography, supporting consistent print quality while reducing setup time and material consumption.

"Typically, when you change from job one to job two, you have to stop the line, change the plate and restart the line," Sharma explained. "Typically, you are wasting 45 minutes to one hour." The new configuration allows job changes with minimal interruption, supporting higher productivity and lower waste.

DIGITAL QUALITY CONTROL

Quality control is similarly connected to the plant's digital architecture. Asepto has installed L&W laboratory testing instruments from ABB along with the L&W Lab Management System. Measurements from connected laboratory equipment can be captured automatically and converted into dashboards and real-time reports, giving operators a more immediate view of quality and productivity indicators.

For a packaging operation producing high-barrier structures for sensitive liquid products, that visibility matters. Laboratory data can be linked more closely to process performance, helping the plant identify



deviations, improve response times and maintain consistency across production batches.

"We wanted laboratory quality control in Egypt to be more than a measurement exercise. The system gives us a much clearer view of what is happening in the lab and helps connect that information with our wider digitalization objectives," Sharma said.

CONNECTING CONVERTING, FINISHING AND HANDLING

The plant's SML extrusion line and IMS high-speed slitters add to the high-throughput manufacturing setup, while automated finishing and material handling bring production visibility deeper into the operation. Reels are barcoded and QR-coded, allowing the system to track their movement to pallets and customers. CSI Madern of the Netherlands supports the plant's packaging automation, palletizing and material-handling systems, further reducing the need for manual intervention in downstream operations.

The objective is not automation for its own sake, but tighter control over material flow. By connecting converting, finishing, packaging and material handling, Asepto is building a production environment in which material movement and identification are increasingly managed as part of the overall manufacturing system.

BUILDING CAPABILITY THROUGH TECHNOLOGY AND PEOPLE

Sharma sees manufacturing performance as a combination of technology, materials and people. "There are three pillars for quality – state-of-the-art machinery, best raw materials and skilled people," he said.

That third pillar is particularly relevant in Egypt, where Asepto is establishing a new aseptic packaging manufacturing capability. Experienced technical personnel from India are being deployed to train and develop local teams, with the intention of gradually transferring operational responsibility to Egyptian employees.

MAKING SUSTAINABILITY COMMERCIALLY VIABLE

Sustainability and material recovery form another area of Asepto's technology development. Its Enzymatic Delamination Technology (EDT) is designed to separate the different material components of used aseptic cartons, including paper fibre, aluminum and polymers. This enables the individual materials to be recovered for further processing and supports improved resource utilization and circularity in carton recovery. Asepto's development work also extends to the use of recycled materials, alternative fiber-based structures, resource-efficiency measures and technologies for the recovery of used packaging.

But Sharma does not view sustainability as a material-substitution exercise alone. "Packaging material and machine have to be developed together," he says, pointing to the interaction between barrier structures, sealing technology, machine settings, cost and performance.

That approach reflects a broader view of innovation at Asepto. Sustainability, automation, digitalization, filling technology and supply-chain efficiency are all becoming competitive factors, but they have to work commercially at scale. "Sustainability has to be scalable, economically viable, functional and affordable," Sharma said.

THE SPECIALIZED SIDE OF CYLINDER TECHNOLOGY

UFlex advances cylinder technology into high-value applications

At a time when packaging converters are navigating rising input costs, currency volatility and growing demands for efficiency, printing cylinder technology is evolving beyond conventional applications. For UFlex, the focus is increasingly on specialized, value-added cylinders that can deliver precision, lower material consumption, advanced finishes and security features across industries.

Parwez Izhar, executive vice president, Printing Cylinders Business, UFlex, discussed these developments with The Packman on the sidelines of the 10th India International Footwear Fair 2026 at Bharat Mandapam, New Delhi. While the exhibition provided an opportunity for UFlex to demonstrate its expertise in leather and leatherette applications, Izhar's comments highlighted the wider capabilities of the company's cylinder business.

One area seeing significant demand is coating cylinders, particularly those used for PVDC coating to enhance barrier properties in films. UFlex supplies such cylinders to customers across India and international markets. The company also manufactures anilox and other coating cylinders for applications ranging from lacquer, wax and UV coating to hot-melt coating.

Izhar points to the growing importance of precision in these applications. Electromechanically engraved cylinders can deliver up to around 4 GSM, while higher-volume applications may require laser engraving. "In case you need 50, 100, 150 GSM cylinders, then there's no other option except people go for the laser engraved cylinders," he said, adding that UFlex has this capability in India.

The company's technology portfolio also extends into specialized embossing, including cylinders capable of replicating effects traditionally produced through manual engraving. Metal embossing, textured embossing, glitter printing and 3D effects are among the



Parwez Izhar, executive vice president, Printing Cylinders Business, Uflex.
Photo: The Packman

applications being developed for industries including footwear, fashion, textiles, metal, FMCG, home décor, construction and many more.

Another emerging application is security printing. UFlex is incorporating hidden text, graphics and micro and nano text into cylinder designs to support anti-counterfeiting requirements. Such features can remain invisible to the naked eye but become identifiable through specialized viewing techniques.

However, the broader printing industry is operating in a dynamic cost environment. Izhar says fluctuations in input costs and ongoing geopolitical developments are influencing cost management. "The market remains uncertain," he said.

Higher raw material and consumables prices, have pushed up manufacturing costs. "In the competitive product where almost every cylinder manufacturing company has electromechanical engraving, the competition is very high." However, similar situation is not with specialized cylinders and premium products. There is a high entry barrier for these products, Izhar said.

Sustainability and efficiency are meanwhile becoming increasingly important. UFlex is working on optimizing cylinder cell structures to reduce ink consumption while maintaining printing precision. Lower ink GSM can translate into substantial savings in ink, solvents and energy, particularly because lower ink volumes reduce the load on the drying and heating systems.

For customers, speed is another critical requirement. Izhar says turnaround times are under increasing pressure, with customers expecting cylinders to be delivered at the lowest turnaround time.

The footwear and fashion segments bring an additional challenge: rapidly changing designs. "The customers always demand that we want something new," Izhar said. Customization is becoming increasingly important, with brands looking for exclusive textures, leather grains, logos and surface finishes tailored to specific collections.

UFlex is also working on achieving high-gloss and high-matte effects, an area Izhar describes as still being in the trial stage. At the same time, the company is exploring ways of making cylinder technology compatible with more sustainable substrates and inks.

Izhar points to a broader evolution in cylinder technology – cylinder technology is no longer simply about transferring ink or creating an embossing effect. Precision, efficiency, customization, security and compatibility with evolving substrates are increasingly shaping the value of the cylinder and, ultimately, the performance of the printing process.

– Mahan Hazarika