

Syed Babar Ali

Advisor, Packages Limited & Founder, LUMS

Profile:

The man behind Packages Limited, Nestle-Milkpak, Interbank, Ali Institute of Education and Lahore University of Management Sciences is perhaps among the greatest success stories in the world. Only those bestowed with a true spirit of nationalism, combined with a genuine flare of entrepreneurship could, and would, dare to challenge the prevalent dogmas and Syed Babar Ali, the youngest son of Syed Maratib Ali- the doyen of Ali family, is just such a person. His career as an entrepreneur, philanthropist and public figure has been multidimensional and the list of his achievements is rather exhaustive. Besides his diverse roles, he contributed largely to revolutionize the Pakistani educational system by evolving Harvard equivalent university in Pakistan, LUMS.

Syed Babar Ali's foresight coupled with sincerity of purpose helped raise the bar of competition in education sector. Being two decades older than his country and having witnessed every single turbulent twist in history of PAKISTAN, he thinks that our country urgently needs sincere leadership. He is of the view that, as a developing nation, more time is needed to create a system that places value on fairness and merit and punishes corruption, therefore, Pakistanis have a long way to go.

HE HAS ACHIEVED GREAT SUCCESS ON CORPORATE LEVEL AND HIS POSITIVE AND CONSTRUCTIVE CONTRIBUTIONS ON NATIONAL LEVEL ARE COMMENDABLE INDEED.

Success Story: Syed Babar Ali is the true legend of Pakistan. He is the one who wholeheartedly dedicated his life for the cause of Pakistan. According to him, one does not have to be a politician to lead the cause of Pakistan. It is this sense of responsibility that has made him a leader. Whether it was education or entrepreneurship, he has excelled in whatever he has done as a visionary. His choice of business and industry has been both pragmatic and full of social consideration, keeping in mind the development aspect. He has been a trend-setter in many aspects. He is a businessman and a philanthropist, but most significantly he is a social entrepreneur.

The brief history of the Ali family's dealings in the world of business in India had been quite venturesome. Rife with success through innovation, it wasn't short of instances of extraordinary determination in the face of certain failure. The patriarch of Ali family, Syed Wazir Ali, was the grandfather of Syed Babar Ali. He started the business in a very small way by opening a shop in Lahore Cantonment around the middle of nineteenth century and later on moved his business to Ferozpur Cantonment. Through his untiring efforts, honest dealings and the support of his two young sons, Syed Ahsan Ali and Syed Maratib Ali, the firm of A&M Wazir Ali became a very successful business of army contracts.

Syed Babar Ali was born in 1926 to this illustrious family. He studied at the University of Michigan in 1947, the year Pakistan became a state. He returned to Pakistan in December that year, ultimately earning his bachelor's degree from Punjab University in Pakistan. According to NY Times, 'He has witnessed every turn in its (Pakistan's) tumultuous history at 83, he feels he has earned the right to give it advice'.

As an entrepreneur and an industrialist, Syed Babar Ali envisioned and set up Packages Ltd. (Pakistan's largest paper & board mill), Milkpak Ltd. Now Nestle Pakistan Ltd. (the largest food processing company in Pakistan), Tetra Pak Pakistan Ltd., IGI Insurance Company Ltd., Tri-Pack Films Ltd. and IGIG Investment Bank. He is the Chairman of Sanofi-Avetis Pakistan Ltd., Siemens Pakistan Engineering Company Ltd. and Coca Cola Beverages Pakistan Ltd. He believes in the joint venture philosophy and most of his businesses are joint ventures with major multinationals.

Packages Ltd. was the first packaging plant in Pakistan. In 1957, its main customers were Pakistan Tobacco Company, Lever Brothers and Lipton- all multinational that had been importing their packaging requirements till then. They extended full cooperation to the new company encouraging it to produce local packaging material to match their specifications. The production facilities at the new company consisted of making cartons out of paperboard and flexible packaging material out of paper, plastic and aluminum foils to serve the packaging needs of the manufacturers. Even in the first year of its operations, the company showed very encouraging results; it made a net profit on the first twelve months' sales of Rs. 6.3 million and the trend continued thereafter. Packages Ltd. Owes a debt of gratitude for its early success and continuous growth not only to its Swedish partner, Akerlund & Rausing, but also to the affectionate support of Dr. Ruben Rausing, who founded the Akerlund & Rausing, the premier packaging company of Europe. Packages Ltd. was the first important Swedish investment in Pakistan and is probably still the most prominent one today.

In 1974, Syed Babar Ali convened the meeting of the senior management of Packages Ltd. to study the national business environment and evaluate the probable investment opportunities for the future. At one time he said, 'If I were interested in making money, I would also have chosen textile or sugar industry instead of taking a risk of investing in the relatively new technology of paperboard packaging. Please understand that I am only interested in assignments that are not only challenging but also have a string element of nation-building through the transfer of new technology to my country'.

Syed Babar Ali has always been genuinely interested in the development of the company and has been appreciative of all efforts towards this end. A culture of self-evaluation and constant improvement permeates the company. Everyone is encouraged to share in perpetual growth through new ideas. However, all development ideas are subject to careful scrutiny and laboratory trials, pilot-scale operation or trial production invariably precedes commercial production. This balanced approach of the management has always paid rich dividends over the years despite a gradual increase in organizations capacity to accept financial challenges. Moreover, Packages Ltd. has always encouraged government functionaries and university students to visit factory premises for mutual learning.

The certain trait that makes Syed Babar Ali a social entrepreneur is difficult to identify. There are so many reasons one after another. Some of them are known to everyone and some of them are not known at all. He promoted the cause of World Wide Fund for Nature (earlier World Wildlife Fund) where he served in various capacities, both in Pakistan and at international level, from 1972 to 1996. He was the international President of WWF from 1996 to 1999 succeeding HRH Prince Philip, the Duke of Edinburgh. The prestigious position was given to him in the view of his interest and achievements in the field of conservation and was a great honour for Pakistan indeed. He is now the Vice President Emeritus, WWF International and President Emeritus WWF-Pakistan. He is also a member of Layton Rehamatullah Benevolent Trust Karachi and Shalamar Hospital, Lahore.

Syed Maratib Ali, the late father of Syed Babar Ali, has always been a source of great inspiration for him, as he grew in an environment of philanthropy, which developed stronger sense of faith in him. Syed Maratib Ali established Syed Maratib Religious and Charitable Trust Society in 1939 to promote public welfare and education of deserving students and to

provide a skilled manpower to the local industry. Then Syed Babar Ali setup Babar Ali foundation in 1985. This foundation gives about a million dollars a year primarily for education and health in Pakistan.

As an educationist, he led the establishment of the Lahore University of Management & Sciences (LUMS) in 1985, of which he has been the first Pro-Chancellor. Whereas, according to NY Times, LUMS is Pakistan's premier management education institution, which has evolved into the approximate equivalent of Harvard University in Pakistan. In 1992, he founded Ali institute of Education for training of primary and secondary school teachers. He is a member on the board of the following important educational institutes of Lahore: Aitchison College, F.C. College, Kinnaird College and Lahore School of Economics. He is the member of the regional advisory board of London Business School and a member of the Initiative on Social Enterprise at Harvard University. He received honours and awards from the Government of Sweden, the Netherlands, an OBE from Britain (1997), and was awarded an Honorary Doctorate Degree of Laws from McGill University, Montreal, Canada (1997).

The biggest achievement of Syed Babar Ali was the establishment of Lahore University of Management Sciences where students get the education of internationally standards and are able to compete all over the globe with other students. Babar Ali believes that:

Babar Ali Foundation was established in 1985. Since its inception, the foundation has received contributions from Syed Babar Ali and his family which also included the donation of a plot of his land located on Upper Mall, Lahore, where he constructed a building at a cost of Rs. 28.6 million in 1996.

The objectives of the organization are to build, aid, assist, set up, manage, maintain and run the schools, colleges, institutions of learning and practical training, libraries, museums, galleries, handicraft centers, parks and places of medical aid and relief.

Its mission is to promote sustainable development by supporting education, training and research. As well as assisting institutes, libraries and hospitals, encouraging nature conservation, culture and sports. Undertaking measures for the diffusion of knowledge and expertise.

It is a time when deterioration of values in society has crippled the growth of our country, corruption is rampant and laws are flouted. With a volatile political situation and instability in economy, people like Syed Babar Ali, who are legitimately willing to give back to the society without desiring for personal gain, are the only hope at this darkest hour. He has achieved great success on corporate level and his positive and constructive contributions on national level are commendable indeed.

Courtesy: Leading Social Entrepreneurs of Pakistan

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