

Apeejay celebrates centenary in city

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

Hyderabad: When the Pauls of the Delhi-based Apeejay Surrendra group decided to uncork the bubbly to mark the group's 100th birthday, they decided to do it not in the group's birthplace Jalandhar in Punjab or even Delhi, where the group has been based for many years now.

They instead chose Hyderabad, where it threw open its seven-star boutique hotel The Park, Hyderabad only last year, to play host to the two-day long celebration that boasted of an enviable invitee list of nearly 400 of the who's who of India's business and fashion world.

Ask Apeejay Surrendra group chairman Karan Paul about this and he is quick to point out: "The Park, Hyderabad is not only the newest addition to the Apeejay family, it is the best we have done." Incidentally, the iconic steel and glass encased Park, Hyderabad overlooking the Hussain-sagar, was the group's first greenfield hotel project and sports motifs on its facade that borrow heavily from the Nizam's jewels.

Paul, who took over the reins of



BIG BIZ PLANS: (From left) Shirin Paul, Karan Paul and Priya Paul during their visit to city on Sunday

the group in 2004 and looks after its finances, strategy, new ventures, operations as well as the tea and shipping business, feels that "Hyderabad will be the market of the future, but it is currently underdeveloped as a great tourism destination."

What started out as a small unit in Jalandhar called 'Amin Chand Pyare Lal' in 1910, has become a Rs 1,500-crore plus turnover conglomer-

ate Apeejay Surrendra group. In fact, the A, P and J of Apeejay Surrendra has been derived from the names Amin Chand (father of group founder Pyare Lal) and Jalandhar.

Today, the group's most visible face may be the Park chain of hotels but what many don't know is that the group, which employs over 43,000 people, straddles diverse interests like shipping, tea, real estate and retail. Also little known is the fact that while a chunk of the group's revenue comes from tea business, its shipping business scores in terms of profitability.

While in 2005, the group acquired 100 year-old British tea brand Typhoo, which it has recently unveiled in the Indian market with a premium positioning, it ventured into tea in the 1980s when it picked up tea estates in Assam. Today the group counts Starbucks and Harrods as customers.

Over the years, the group also forayed into the retail business with the acquisition of 'iconic Kolkata-based tea room Flurys in the mid-60s, the Oxford Bookstores in the 80s and went on to set up tea retail chain Cha Bar in 2000, which today is attached to the bookstores. It has recently also ven-

tured into shipbuilding in joint venture with Bharati Shipyard and is sailing into two shipyard projects in West Bengal and Orissa.

The group now wants to take its tea and retail brands to overseas markets, grow its real estate and hospitality business. "Our vision and ambition is to be the largest privately-owned family business in India. We are happy in the current businesses and will continue to focus on these five core areas and grow within them," explains Karan Paul.

Points out Park hotels chairperson Priya Paul: "We want to emerge as a 30 hotels chain by 2020 from the existing nine hotels." Currently the group has upcoming hotels in Pune and Kolkata and two hotels under management contract in Kochi and Goa.

Adds Priti Paul, the third of the Paul siblings, who divides her time between Morocco, London and Delhi, and looks after the retail and real estate business: "We have real estate holdings in many Indian cities divided over nearly 100 companies. Now, we want to consolidate them under one entity Apeejay Real Estate."

Venkat Rao M