

IRON & STEEL REVIEW

A GLOBAL PUBLICATION ON STEEL & HEAVY ENGINEERING

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Almatris India is a key player in global growth, strengthening its supply chain resilience through diversification to mitigate the impact of economic uncertainties. The expansion in India reinforces our dedication to sustainable practices, integrating eco-friendly manufacturing with local supply. As part of Almatris Mission NeutrAL, locally sourced Tabular Alumina contributes to reduced CO₂ emissions for the overall industry, thereby solidifying its commitment to global industry leadership and environmental stewardship.



www.almatis.com



Anil Sönmez
Chief Executive Officer
Almatis

“The Falta plant has enabled us to strengthen our presence in the Asia-Pacific region”

When it comes to high-quality alumina-based products for the high-performance refractory and ceramics markets, Almatís is considered the ultimate choice. With over 100 years of alumina expertise, the company is known for its innovative solutions, with tabular alumina being a cornerstone of its offerings.

In an exclusive interview with Santosh Mahanti, Editor of Iron & Steel Review magazine, Anil Sönmez, Chief Executive Officer of Almatís, tells us how the company managed to withstand the challenging conditions in the global refractory and ceramics markets over the past year and witnessed considerable progress. He also shares valuable insights into the current state of the global alumina market. He highlights the performance of the tabular manufacturing plant in Falta, West Bengal, which is playing a key role in driving growth at Almatís globally by serving as a strategic production centre.

How has been your journey so far at Almatís? What challenges have you faced in the past couple of years?

My journey at Almatís has been both rewarding and challenging. Over the past year, we've navigated through a dynamic business environment, marked by global economic shifts and the ongoing impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. These challenges have required us to be agile and proactive in addressing supply chain disruptions, ensuring the safety of our workforce, and adapting to changing market demands.

Almatís as a whole has evolved wonderfully from those challenges and fluctuating conditions in the refractories and ceramics markets. The demand for our products in these sectors remained robust, and we had to carefully manage our production capabilities and supply chains to meet the needs of our customers.

Despite the challenges, I am proud to say that Almatís has demonstrated resilience and adaptability. Our commitment to quality and service has allowed us to maintain strong relationships with our clients across various industries. Looking ahead, we are optimistic about the growth potential, especially in the tabular alumina business, given the anticipated expansion in the Iron and Steel industry.

We continue to focus on operational excellence, sustainability, and meeting the evolving needs of our customers. Almatís is well-prepared to navigate these dynamics, leveraging our expertise, commitment to excellence, and strategic vision for sustained success in the industry.

What are your thoughts on the current and future global alumina market, both from the supply and consumption sides?

The global alumina market is undergoing interesting dynamics both on the supply and consumption fronts. On the supply side, we have witnessed fluctuations in raw material prices, geopolitical influences, and ongoing efforts to enhance sustainability in the industry. These factors contribute to an environment that requires strategic decision-making and adaptability.

Almatís, as a key player in the alumina market, is closely monitoring these trends. We anticipate continued growth in the demand for specialty alumina products, driven by the expansion of key industries such as Steel, Cement and Glass, to name a few. The global push for sustainable practices and the increasing importance of high-performance materials further contribute to the positive outlook for alumina consumption.

In terms of supply, securing a stable and cost-effective supply of raw materials remains a focus for us. This involves managing factors such as energy costs, regulatory changes, and geopolitical influences that may impact the availability of key inputs.

Looking into the future, our focus on innovation and the quality of our products, particularly in the calcined aluminas, reactive aluminas, cements and binder segment, aligns with the evolving needs of our customers. Products like CL370 provide high performance characteristics that make it a favorite for both shaped and unshaped applications. CTC20, another reactive alumina is an important ingredient for runner castables. We have a wide range of such products, which are unique and pure in enhancing the application performance. While challenges persist, the global alumina market presents exciting opportunities.

What is the demand scenario for tabular alumina in the Indian refractory sector? What major steps are you taking to fulfil the increasing refractory requirements in India?

The demand for tabular alumina in the Indian refractory sector has shown promising growth in recent times. The Indian market, with its expanding steel and construction industries, presents significant opportunities for high-performance refractory materials. Almatris continues to be the pioneer and leader in specialty alumina chemicals.

To fulfill the rising refractory requirements in India, we have implemented certain initiatives, which includes enhanced production capabilities to ensure a stable and consistent supply to our customers. This involves investments in manufacturing processes, technology upgrades, and logistical efficiency improvements.

Additionally, we are engaging in research and development efforts to further optimize our products for the unique demands of the Indian refractory sector. This involves customizing formulations to enhance performance in specific applications, thereby offering our customers tailored solutions that address their evolving needs.

Furthermore, we are exploring eco-friendly and energy-efficient practices to minimize our environmental footprint while maintaining the high quality and performance standards that Almatris is known for.

Tell us about Almatris' current positioning in the refractory market.

Almatris holds a strong and strategic position in the global refractory market. Our company has consistently been recognized

as a leading supplier of high-quality alumina-based products, catering to diverse industries such as steel, ceramics, glass, and more.

In the refractory market specifically, Almatris is well-regarded for its innovative solutions, with tabular alumina being a cornerstone of our offerings. Tabular alumina, known for its high-purity and exceptional thermal properties, has positioned Almatris as a preferred choice for customers in applications where refractories play a critical role, such as in the steel and cement industries.

Our commitment to providing customized solutions sets us apart. We work closely with our customers to understand their unique challenges and requirements, offering tailored products and technical support. This collaborative approach has fostered strong, long-term relationships, making Almatris a trusted partner in the refractory market.

Our efforts to minimize environmental impact and promote sustainable manufacturing align with the growing preferences of customers who seek not only high-performance materials but also a commitment to corporate responsibility.

As we look to the future, our positioning in the refractory market is supported by ongoing investments in research and development, ensuring that we stay at the forefront of technological advancements. We are dedicated to maintaining and strengthening our leadership in the refractory sector, both globally and in key markets like India, where the demand is on the rise.

Can you shed some light on how the tabular manufacturing plant in Falta, West Bengal, India is performing presently? How is the facility driving growth at Almatris Globally?

The tabular manufacturing plant in Falta, West Bengal, India, is a key asset in Almatris' global operations. The facility has been performing exceptionally well, contributing significantly to our ability to meet the growing demand for tabular alumina in the local market, at the most competitive price and JIT availability. The factory is running with "nil" quality related complaints.

The Falta plant plays a crucial role in driving growth at Almatris globally by serving as a strategic production hub. Its location in West Bengal allows us to effectively cater to the growing demand for high-quality tabular alumina in the Indian market. The facility's operational efficiency and commitment to quality and sustainability positions it as a cornerstone in our commitment to secured supply chain.

The plant in Falta is equipped with state-of-the-art technology, ensuring that we adhere to the highest industry standards in the manufacturing of tabular alumina.

In terms of growth, the Falta plant has enabled us to strengthen our presence in the Asia-Pacific region, capitalizing on the dynamic industrial landscape in India and neighboring countries. This regional focus aligns with our broader strategy to be a key player in the global specialty alumina market. Our aim is to enhance the capacity further, to meet the growing demand in the region.

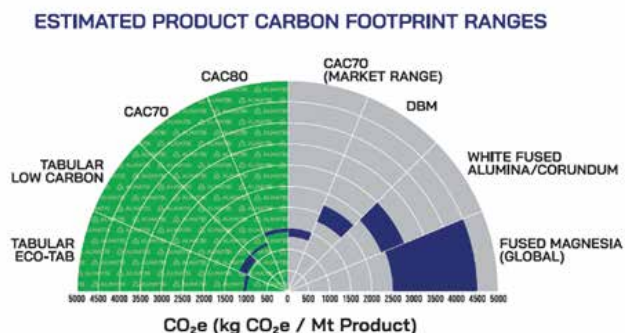
As we move forward, we will continue to invest in the Falta facility, exploring opportunities for expansion and technological enhancements.

How do you think the recession situation in Europe is going to affect the business? How are you preparing to tackle the challenge?

The potential impact of a European recession on Almatris is of significant concern. We are already facing challenges such as shifts in market demand and economic uncertainties. However, we have built upon some of the strategies to tackle these challenges which include:

Assessing the economic landscape to anticipate changes in consumer behavior and market demand during a recession is crucial and we as a team are working round the clock to combat the situation. Implementing adaptive measures such as cost optimization and operational efficiency improvements to ensure resilience in a recessionary environment.

Prioritizing innovation to introduce new products and maintain competitiveness during economic challenges is a focus area now. Almatris' mission for the lowest delivered CO₂ footprint aims at 2.5x lower footprint than other competitive white aggregates and ~20% less than competitive sintered alumina. UniteCr 2023 witnessed the launch of ECO-TAB[®] Aluminas, a new lower density alumina refractory aggregate developed for wear linings for use in steel ladles and other vessels with thermal cycles.



Considering the global economic context, we are implementing measures not only focused on Europe but also on a global scale to ensure a comprehensive and adaptive strategy.

What is your future growth and expansion plan to tap the growing Indian market?

As part of Almatris' strategic vision, we recognize the immense potential of the Indian market and are committed to further expanding our presence to meet the evolving needs of the industries we serve. Our future growth and expansion plan in India are multi-faceted, focusing on several key areas.

To begin with, Almatris' new logo and brand identity launched in 2023, was a major step in Almatris' 100+ year journey. It symbolizes our bold ambitions to grow in our core markets with a stronger focus on sustainability. Our rebranding is a visual representation of our dedication to making a positive impact on the world.

Following this, comes our plan to invest in expanding production capacity in India, ensuring that we can meet the increasing demand for our high-quality alumina products. This may involve upgrades to existing facilities and the exploration of new manufacturing locations to strategically position ourselves for growth. Investments in research and development, specifically tailored to the Indian market will be another area of focus. This would include developing new products or optimizing existing ones to address the unique challenges faced by industries in India.

Our expansion plans in India will actively seek collaborations and explore opportunities for diversification, to enhance our understanding of market dynamics. This would also help incorporate sustainable practices, ensuring that our growth is environmentally responsible.

Identifying emerging sectors where our high-performance alumina products can make a significant impact will be our focus for strengthening the core market. This may involve adopting eco-friendly manufacturing processes, reducing our carbon footprint, and actively contributing to the communities in which we operate.

Our commitment to excellence, innovation, and sustainability will underpin all aspects of our growth strategy in India. We are confident that, by aligning with the dynamic needs of the Indian market, Almatris will continue to be a preferred partner for industries seeking cutting-edge alumina solutions. ■