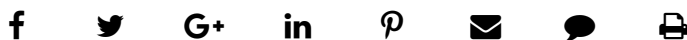


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Former HUL chief T Thomas dies

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Was a remarkable institution-builder, says HUL CMD

MUMBAI, MARCH 2

T Thomas, who served as chairman of Hindustan Lever Ltd (now Hindustan Unilever Ltd) from 1973 to 1980, passed away in Mumbai on Friday at the age of 90.

He started his career at the company as an industrial engineer in 1950 and is best remembered for his successful attempts at retaining majority control of the Anglo-Dutch multinational, Unilever Plc, in HLL at a time when several multinationals were leaving India. The Foreign Exchange Regulations Act of the time required all companies in non-core sector activities to dilute their foreign equity to 40 per cent. This prompted several multinationals, including Coca-Cola, Shell Petroleum and IBM, to walk out.

Majority stake for Unilever

But Thomas was convinced that the majority shareholding by Unilever was necessary for continued access to global technology and a professional management culture. It took him several years and many visits to Delhi to convince the government to allow 51 per cent shareholding by Unilever. Essentially, the company agreed to ensure that 60 per cent of its turnover would be in core sector or 'priority sector' activities and 10 per cent of exports would be items from this sector.

His other major success at HLL was during the price control regime of the early 1970s, when the government controlled the prices of essential commodities, including soaps and vanaspati, which constituted a major portion of the company's business. He continued to work with the government on this issue, meeting with then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi to convince her to lift price restrictions on soap on the promise that



HLL would manufacture a 'Janata' soap. Soon after, the government decontrolled soap. If price controls had continued, the company would have had to face mounting losses.

Academic phase

Thomas went on to serve on the board of Unilever Plc in London for 10 years, where he was responsible for consolidating the Worldwide Specialty Chemicals Group and making it one of the MNC's major profitable and growing product groups.

"Thomas led the company through the difficult price control era and laid the foundation for Unilever to retain its majority holding under the Foreign Exchange Regulation Act at the time. He spearheaded the launch of the Jammu detergents factory and Haldia sodium tri-polyphosphate plant. He was instrumental in recasting the company's management trainee programme, where trainees were given an exposure of working in rural areas for their all-round development," HUL said in a statement.

On retiring from the company in 1989, Thomas took on the role of a visiting scholar at the Sloan School at Massachusetts Institute of Technology in Boston and taught a course on Global Strategy to MBA students. On his return to India, he set up the Indus Venture Fund, the country's first venture capital fund in 1992. In his long and illustrious career, Thomas served on the boards of several companies, including Lafarge India, Glaxo India, and Schneider Electric Conzerv India Pvt. Ltd. He was Chairman, Board of Governors of the prestigious Cathedral School in South Mumbai. In 2013 he became the Chairman of *Business Standard* newspaper where he continued to write opinion pieces until recently.

T Thomas - BusinessLine

A chance meeting with St. Mother Teresa in the early 1970s led to his close association with the Missionaries of Charity. He helped convert old Unilever warehouses in Byculla to Asha Daan, a home for

destitute women and children in Mumbai.

Sanjiv Mehta, CEO and MD, HUL said: “Thomas was a remarkable leader and an institution builder. He was a great example of a purpose-driven and values-led leader. His legacy will always live on.”

Published on March 02, 2018

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