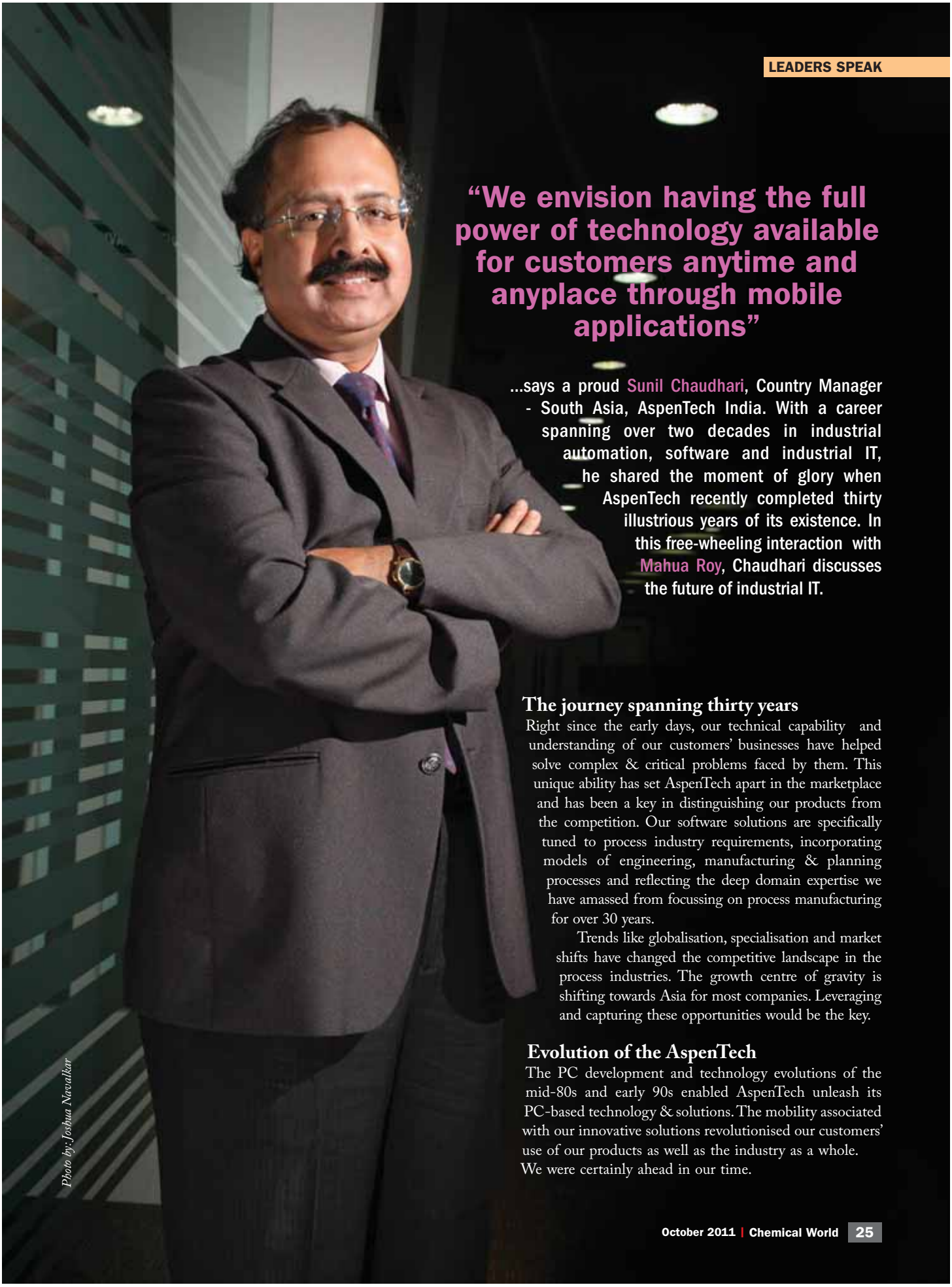

"We envision having the full power of technology available for customers anytime and anyplace through mobile applications"

...says a proud Sunil Chaudhari, Country Manager - South Asia, AspenTech India. With a career spanning over two decades in industrial automation, software and industrial IT, he shared the moment of glory when AspenTech recently completed thirty illustrious years of its existence. In this free-wheeling interaction with Mahua Roy, Chaudhari discusses the future of industrial IT.

The journey spanning thirty years

Right since the early days, our technical capability and understanding of our customers' businesses have helped solve complex & critical problems faced by them. This unique ability has set AspenTech apart in the marketplace and has been a key in distinguishing our products from the competition. Our software solutions are specifically tuned to process industry requirements, incorporating models of engineering, manufacturing & planning processes and reflecting the deep domain expertise we have amassed from focussing on process manufacturing for over 30 years.

Trends like globalisation, specialisation and market shifts have changed the competitive landscape in the process industries. The growth centre of gravity is shifting towards Asia for most companies. Leveraging and capturing these opportunities would be the key.

Evolution of the AspenTech

The PC development and technology evolutions of the mid-80s and early 90s enabled AspenTech unleash its PC-based technology & solutions. The mobility associated with our innovative solutions revolutionised our customers' use of our products as well as the industry as a whole. We were certainly ahead in our time.

Photo by: Joshua Navalkar

The mid-90s saw development of the first graphical user interface, which led to adoption of our technologies multifold, to cater to a much larger market. It reduced barriers, enhanced ease-of-use and increased the sheer number of people that used our products.

Another hallmark achievement has been AspenTech's ability to acquire and integrate some of best of breed companies & synergistic technologies in areas such as costing, equipment design, plant automation and manufacturing solutions. This helped us to grow our capabilities beyond the core simulation & modelling business to cover a larger portfolio from engineering to manufacturing and supply chain management.

Process optimisation for the chemical industry

The combination of process data and process models provides a deeper understanding of the behaviour of whole process and helps to uncover opportunities for process improvements and, therefore, improved competitiveness. This would enable chemical manufacturers to have visibility into their operations and help them make better & faster decisions at every level in their organisation, be it at the individual operator unit level, supply chain level, or at the corporate level.

A number of key applications embed process models including engineering, planning, scheduling, production accounting and advanced process control. Models enable management and automation of important value-adding business processes such as:

- Process simulation, de-bottlenecking, capacity and asset optimisation
- Crude oil feedstock selection
- Scheduling of an optimal operations plan taking account of operating constraints
- Maintaining a process unit at economically optimum operating targets in the face of operation disturbances
- Maximising operational performance while minimising energy costs

These are just some of the many examples of process optimisation. More than 1,500 blue chip companies in the process industry optimise a wide range of manufacturing, supply chain and engineering operations every day, using AspenTech software, thereby improving competitiveness and profitability by increasing throughput & productivity, reducing operating costs, enhancing capital efficiency, and decreasing working capital requirements.

Balancing cost and energy efficiency perfectly

Our technology *aspenONE* helps the chemical industry achieve sustainability and cost-efficiency by offering solutions for each phase of the business in an integrated environment, providing visibility, sharing and enabling reuse of data & process models. In fact, companies deploying this solution are able to generate benefits of approximately $ 28 million per year per plant, with payback in months instead of years.

Major challenges to be addressed in the chemical industry

The major challenges faced by the chemical industry that need to be addressed by technology providers include:

- Increasingly competitive landscape due to globalisation
- Margin squeeze due to low product pricing power
- Maintaining asset effectiveness at high plant utilisation rates
- Increasingly stringent governmental regulations
- Increased market volatility and eroding customer loyalty

Cloud computing and mobile applications

Futuristically speaking, in the area of process engineering, we see significant advancements in terms of leveraging internet capability and mobile applications. The equivalent computing power of that first PC, which we built at AspenTech, has now been far surpassed by the computing power in a typical mobile device. The ability of the technology tool to run in a cloud and a range of other IT advancements is likely to impact & change the way software engineering for process industries is going to be in future. The unprecedented ability of people to be able to access data and technologies that were in the past either unavailable to them or extremely difficult to access will greatly magnify the impact that engineers can have on their organisations.

For example, we believe the focus of future development and course will be in making data & models available to our customers through the web & cloud. We envision having the full power of technology and tools available for customers anytime & anyplace through mobile applications. And I think the sheer computing power now on tap is going to allow us to visualise, analyse and solve problems & bring people together in a way that has not been possible before. These are exciting times. ■

UP CLOSE & PERSONAL

What motivates you?

The biggest motivator for me is seeing my customers achieve success using our solutions and services. I always envision myself as an entrepreneur within my organisation, and think in those lines. A person must realise that the mandate of a job should align with his personal goals. Also, you must recognise the fact that you need to do justice to the faith the organisation and colleagues have placed in you.

A business etiquette that you do not leave home without

My company badge. It is a symbol of responsibility and reminds me that now it is the beginning of a new day.

Your way of spotting an industry trend

I always keep track of macroeconomic industry investment outlook and sentiment. This is clubbed with listening and interacting with key customers. Besides, I frequently read about the latest in the industry and market.