

Conversation with Mr. Bali Padda

By Richard Jones / The Rambling Brick

Images by Richard Jones

As part of the LEGO® Fan Media Days at the end of May 2017, the represented LEGO® Fan Media organisations were joined by the CEO of the LEGO® Group, **Bali Padda**, for a dialog. He has been with the LEGO® Group for 15 years, initially based in the United States, and then in the UK, where he has been in the role of Chief Operations Officer.

While the appointment of his successor, Niels B. Christiansen, has already been announced, Mr Padda gave us some interesting insights into some of the issues currently facing the company:

RLFMs: You have now been in your new role for around six months. What do you think are the challenges in this new role?

Bali Padda: It is exciting to be part of a leading global brand. The company turns 85 years old this year. Our challenges include being able to maintain sustainable growth, and to respond with speed and agility to challenges posed by the world around us. I would also like to see us focus on internal leadership development.

RLFMs: What's happening with regard to sustainability and environmental responsibility?

BP: We have just reached our 100% renewable energy target through investment in wind farms in Europe. There are also forthcoming solar panels on the roof of our factory in China.

We have also invested 1 billion DKK (135 million EUR) towards developing sustainable solutions for our products and packaging: We have one hundred researchers exploring new materials to develop new materials that will be more sustainable. Our goal is to be successful in this by 2032, which will be the 100th anniversary for the company.

RLFMs: How do you feel about AFOLs who are now working with clone brick makers such as LEPIN/Xinbao?

BP: It is disheartening to see. I feel, as a company, we should look into how we have 'failed' these builders.

RLFMs: What about countries with no direct LEGO® presence, but rather being distributed by a third party (such as Chile, and other countries in South America)?

BP: At present, we are at our limit with regard to our capacity of production from the new Chinese factory. It will be a few years before we can look directly at those markets. We have had huge growth over the past few years, but that might also turn out to be our Achilles heel.

RLFMs: Will 3D Printing make an impact in the direction the company takes in the near future?

BP: We have been experimenting with 3D printing over the last 10 years. Obviously it is used for prototyping, but as to where else it leads us, who can say?

RLFMs: How does the Group relate to the LEGO® House?

BP: The LEGO® House represents what we are all about as a company.

RLFMs: When it comes to technology, there are concerns regarding ongoing compatibility: LEGO® Bricks from 40 years ago are still compatible with the systems of today, however concurrent technologies are not always compatible. For example, when Mindstorms was initially released, there was adaptor cable available to the 9V motor system. With the change to power functions, this has not been produced.



BP: We are the masters of keeping the system in play. New technologies will often break with backwards compatibility in order to progress. However, we need to learn how to ensure more compatibility between current products.

RLFMs: How are you feeling about the LEGO® Batman Movie? It didn't feel as though it had the same impact as The LEGO® Movie...

BP: The LEGO® Movie exceeded everyone's expectations: ours, the studio's and the distributor's. There was a halo effect that saw an incredible increase in interest in the product. The LEGO® Batman Movie performed well, but perhaps not quite as expected in the wake of The LEGO® Movie. The studio was happy with the result.

RLFMs: What about the apparent dependency on third party intellectual properties these days?

BP: IP's are an important part of the business, but we have to work so that they don't become critical to us. We need to ensure that we continue to maintain a balance, whether it is 70:30 one year, and then 40:60 the next. We need to ensure that our core brands, the brick and LEGO® owned themes, remain strong.

RLFMs: About yourself: you were previously based in London. Have you moved to Denmark?

BP: I still live in the UK, but have an apartment in Billund for the working week. My family live in the UK. Some weekends I travel back to London and some weekends my family joins me here.

RLFMs: What about LEGO®? What was your favourite theme growing up? What are you currently building?

BP: We did not have any LEGO® in our house when I was growing up in India. Although now, my favourite theme is Technic. I am currently putting together one of the new large sets, which is due to be released in the next couple of months.

I first got involved with LEGO® as an Adult when I saw a remote controlled LEGO® car, which I bought for my child. My wife commented that our child may have been a bit young for that particular model at that time, but I got it anyway...

RLFMs: Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you!

BP: Thank you.

Once Niels B Christiansen takes over as CEO on October 1st, Bali Padda will continue to be actively involved with the LEGO® Brand Group.



Thanks to Jetro de Chateau, Lluís Gibert, of HispaBrick Magazine®, and Christian Breinbauer, of Revistabricks, for assistance in recalling and transcribing this dialog.

Please note: the questions asked came from just some of the LEGO® Fan Media organisations represented in Billund on these days. The actual source of each question was not recorded at the time. For a complete list of those LEGO® Fan Media represented, please refer to my blog post on the Fan Media Days.

<http://ramblingbrick.com/2017/06/05/busy-in-billund-the-LEGO-fan-media-days-2017/>

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