

India's Technical Textiles Mission and its significance

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By Dr Seshadri Ramkumar

After a few years in discussion and making, India Government on January 20th officially launched Technological Mission on Technical Textiles (TMTT) in an event jointly organized by the Ministry of Textiles and the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI) in New Delhi.

This national program puts India on a pedestal as to my understanding no other country has created such a nationally significant mission to boost the growth of value-added textiles. This national project is mission oriented and is aimed at imparting practical knowledge in specialty textiles and provides marketing support for entrepreneurs.

Technical Textiles in India: In India, technical textiles sector is estimated to grow at a rate of 10-11%, whereas, globally, the growth is estimated at 3-4%. The growth in India has happened predominantly due to the efforts of the government of India for the past five years. I was privileged to be part of the early efforts and awareness programs conducted by the Ministry of Textiles, India in the year 2005.

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Ever since, the government has supported a number of awareness programs and workshops throughout India. Many national and international trade bodies and institutes such as the USA based Association of the Nonwoven Fabrics Industry popularly as INDA, Brussels based European Disposables and Nonwovens Industry Association and FICCI. Along these lines, Lubbock, USA based Texas tech University has been playing an important role in creating greater awareness and developing international linkages to boost the growth of nonwovens and specialty fabrics industry. Texas Tech University began its effort in India in the year 2004 with this author taking efforts to create an international conference to create more knowledge in technical textiles.

The conference HPTEx-2004 was developed as a collaborative endeavor between Texas Tech University, USA and the Coimbatore based Kumaraguru College of Technology. This conference attracted many international and national experts in the field of advanced textiles and paved the way for awareness programs in technical textiles in South India. This conference has grown in stature now and is a recognized event in the field of specialty textiles and is known as "Advances in Textiles, Machinery, Nonwovens & Technical textiles," commonly referred to as ATNT. This conference played the pivotal role in bringing the USA based INDA to India for the first time in 2006. In fact in 2006, I had the distinct privilege of inviting Mr. Ian Butler of the Association of the Nonwoven Fabrics Industry to India.

Ian is responsible for the industry statistics at INDA. When he made the presentation at the international conference hosted by Texas Tech University in Coimbatore, his estimate on India's nonwoven roll good production was about 30,000 to 40,000 metric tons. India's roll good nonwoven production now stands over 100,000 metric tons. India has tripled its production in 3 years. Mr. Butler of INDA witnessed firsthand India's eagerness to get into a new sector within the textiles industry.

Within a year after that event INDA officially organized its first ever nonwovens workshop in Mumbai in January 2007. Over two hundred participants attended the event for which I was the tutor. Ever since, I have been tutoring the INDA nonwovens training workshops in India. Bangalore based TechniTex Nonwovens, Pvt. Ltd., offers these training programs with license from INDA. Fifteen such workshops have been offered in various cities such as Mumbai, Coimbatore, Surat, Bangalore and Kolkata. The government sponsored various sector-wise awareness programs and other related conferences by INDA, Texas Tech University and FICCI have generated general understanding and awareness on nonwovens and specialty textiles.

The need for diversification of the cotton spinning and garment sectors into value-added segments is now well understood by the stakeholders. This has been possible due to the plethora of training workshops, seminars and conferences in technical textiles. What is needed now? Timely and useful knowledge on: a) practical know-how and b) marketing is the need of the hour. The technological mission on technical textiles is aimed at these aspects.

Technological Mission on Technical Textiles (TMTT): TMTT with a budget outlay of Rupees 200 crores for a

period of five years (2010/11 to 2014/15) has two mini-missions. Mini-mission I is aimed at boosting the know-how on technical textiles via different means. According to government, the objectives of mini-mission I include standardization, creating common testing facilities, indigenous development of prototypes and resource centers with I.T. infrastructure. Mini-mission II supports market development activities.

Under Mini mission I, Government of India will establish four Centers of Excellence (CoEs) which will focus on: 1) Nonwovens; 2) Composites; 3) Indutech and 4) Sportech. Each center will have a maximum allocation of Rupees 24.5 crores. Each will have a ceiling of Rupees 20 crores for capital equipment, Rupees 2 crores for training facilities and Rupees 3 crores towards recurring expenses for employing scientists and consultants over a period of 3 years.

TMTT: Hits and Misses

- 1) Prioritizing technical textiles by forming a national mission is an important milestone in the growth journey of technical textiles sector in India.
- 2) India has taken a leadership role in creating the mission which to my knowledge no other country had done heretofore.
- 3) The mission has rightly put emphasis on: a) practical know-how and knowledge transfer and b) marketing.
- 4) TMMT is creating awareness and interest among stakeholders, which will boost this sector's growth.

Although, the TMTT is a positive step, it is necessary to put emphasis on two aspects of the technical textiles sector. They are: 1) converting sector and 2) chemical finishes and application. TMTT at this present stage has overlooked these two important sectors. So far, government has emphasized the importance on product based centers such as agrotexiles, protective textiles, geotexiles, medical textiles, sportech and indutech.

Only through the TMTT, government has realized the need for process oriented centers such as nonwovens and composites. It is important to enhance the technical know-how on processes which can be used to develop specialty textiles. Such an endeavor is important to create more opportunities in the technical textiles sector. The government in the next phase of TMTT should emphasize the importance of process oriented centers as a means of diversifying the textile industry.

Overall, launching the TMTT is of significance to the Indian textiles industry. Developing the converting sector that can create more small and medium sized enterprises should be an important task. Converting sector will be the engine for job creation and will grow the Indian textile industry.

(Dr Seshadri Ramkumar is Associate Professor at Nonwovens & Advanced Materials Laboratory, Texas Tech University, USA and is a regular contributor to Commodity Online)