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India's Technical Textiles Mission—A Reality

Seshadri Ramkumar

India takes Leadership: After a few years in discussion and decision making, the Indian government January 20 officially launched the 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 makes India—to my knowledge—the only country to create 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, the 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. 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 U.S.-based INDA, Association of the Nonwoven Fabrics Industry or Brussels, Belgium-based European Disposables and Nonwovens Industry Association (EDANA). Along these lines, Lubbock, TX-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 by creating 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. In 2006, this conference played the pivotal role in bringing INDA to India for the first time. Within a year after that event INDA officially organized its first ever nonwovens workshop in Mumbai in January 2007. More than 200 participants attended the event for which I was the tutor. Ever since, I have been tutoring the INDA nonwovens training workshops in India.

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 the 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 three years.

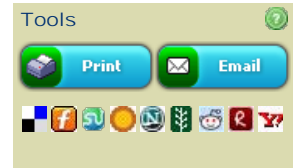
TMTT: Hits and Misses

- 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) TMTT 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—the converting sector and the chemical finishes and application. TMTT, at this present stage, has overlooked these two important sectors. So far, the government has emphasized the importance of product-based centers such as agrotexiles, protective textiles, geotextiles, 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 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. The converting sector will be the engine for job creation and will grow the Indian textile industry.

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