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India's technical textiles mission - a reality

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Dr Seshadri Ramkumar discusses the new investments in technical textiles and nonwovens in India

India takes leadership

After a number of years in discussion, the Government of India officially launched Technological Mission on Technical Textiles (TMTT) on January 20, in an event jointly organised by the Ministry of Textiles and the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI) in New Delhi. This national programme 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 speciality 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 Indian government for the past five years. I was privileged to be part of the early efforts and awareness programmes conducted by the Ministry of Textiles in India in 2005. Ever since, the government has supported a number of awareness programmes and workshops throughout India from national and international trade bodies and institutes, such as the USA-based Association of the Nonwoven Fabrics Industry (INDA), Brussels-based European Disposables, the Nonwovens Industry Association and FICCI.

US-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 speciality fabrics industry. The university began its efforts in India in 2004, when I began to make plans to create an international conference to establish more knowledge in technical textiles.

The conference HPTEX-2004 was developed as a collaborative endeavour 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. The conference has now grown in stature and is a recognised event in the field of speciality textiles, known as Advances in Textiles, Machinery, Nonwovens and Technical textiles (ATNT).

This conference played the pivotal role in bringing INDA to India for the first time in 2006 and in that year I had the distinct privilege of inviting Ian Butler, who is responsible for industry statistics at INDA, to India. 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, meaning India has tripled its production in three 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 organised its first ever nonwovens workshop in Mumbai in January 2007. Over two hundred participants attended the event for which I was the tutor and ever since, I have tutored the INDA nonwovens training workshops in India. Bangalore-based TechniTex Nonwovens, Pvt. Ltd offers these training programmes with license from INDA and 15 such workshops have been offered in various cities such as Mumbai, Coimbatore, Surat, Bangalore and Kolkata.

The government-sponsored awareness programmes and other related conferences by INDA,

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Texas Tech University and FICCI have generated general understanding and awareness on nonwovens and speciality 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 for technical textiles is aimed to address these points.

Technological Mission on Technical Textiles (TMTT)

TMTT has a budget outlay of Rs 200 crores (US\$ 43.9 million) for a period of five years (2010/11 to 2014/15) and 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 standardisation, creating common testing facilities, indigenous development of prototypes and resource centres with IT infrastructure. Mini-mission II supports market development activities.

Under Mini mission I, the Indian government will establish four Centres of Excellence (CoEs) which will focus on: 1) Nonwovens; 2) Composites; 3) Indutech and 4) Sportech. Each centre will have a maximum allocation of Rs 24.5 crores (US\$ 5.4 million). Each will have a ceiling of Rs 20 crores (US\$ 4.4 million) for capital equipment, Rs 2 crores (US\$ 0.4 million) for training facilities and Rs 3 crores (US\$ 0.7 million) towards recurring expenses for employing scientists and consultants over a period of three years.

TMTT: Hits and Misses

- 1) Prioritising 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, the Indian government has emphasised the importance on product-based centres such as agrotextiles, protective textiles, geotextiles, medical textiles, sportech and indutech. Only through the TMTT, the government has realised the need for process-oriented centres such as nonwovens and composites. It is important to enhance the technical know-how on processes which can be used to develop speciality textiles. Such an endeavour is important to create more opportunities in the technical textiles sector. In the next phase of TMTT, the government should emphasise the importance of process oriented-centres 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 and it seems that the converting sector will be the engine for job creation and will grow the Indian textile industry.

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