

One heckuva trifecta: Tech, India and cotton.

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Summary:

Tech and India's shared interest in cotton could frame some pretty big-time partnerships

One of Texas Tech's top researchers will take another trip to India next month to help the nation's cotton industry find a footing in the budding nonwoven sector.

But there's more to Seshadri Ramkumar's upcoming trip than just some cross-border cotton talk. These sorts of seminars also serve as a reminder of the huge and hungry cotton market awaiting Tech's unrivaled expertise.

Seshadri Ramkumar, a cotton researcher at Tech's Institute of Environmental & Human Health, will lead [a two-day seminar](#) ^[1] beginning Aug. 12 in Coimbatore, India, at the heart of the nation's booming cotton industry.

The seminar, a program sponsored by the North Carolina-based [Association of the Nonwoven Fabrics Industry](#) ^[2], will give the nation's textile makers, growers, policy makers and researchers a basic look at cotton's potential as a [nonwoven material](#) ^[3] -- or, basically, fabrics that are held together by raw fiber webs instead of yarn.

As crude as the fabric sounds, it's anything but. Nonwovens are actually on the cutting edge of modern cotton research. Thanks in no small part to Ramkumar's ground-breaking research at Tech, the sector is poised to see explosive growth in the next few decades.

Dr. Ram -- as he is more commonly known -- made [headlines](#) ^[4] last year with the unveiling of a high-tech new nonwoven cotton decontamination wipe for U.S. soldiers. It's basically a spongy cloth that soldiers can use to clean off the icky stuff accompanying various types of chemical weapons. (See photo above of a sample I received from TIEHH.)

The fabric has returned the spotlight in the last few months [when Dr. Ram announced](#) ^[5] he's trying to get BP to use it to absorb oil from the waters of the Gulf of Mexico.

"But enough about cotton already!" you're probably saying. "This is supposed to be a higher education blog."

You're right.

I spent some time this afternoon chatting on the phone with Dr. Ram. Evidently he's been following my coverage of Tech's global reach and wanted to point out the larger implications of these sorts of trips to India, the nation of his birth.

The topic has been on my mind a lot lately [6]. Everywhere I look – whether insidehighered.com [7] or the Chronicle of Higher Education [8] or take your pick of higher-ed buzz publications – talk of universities engaging in an array of overseas activities is rampant.

It's difficult to put any single peg on what Tech's international partnerships might look like. They take many forms.

And this is certainly one of them.

Think about it from Tech's perspective: One of the university's biggest figures from one of its most prominent research areas will be at the center of attention in a room full of influential representatives from India's academic, industrial and policy-making sectors.

Nor will it be the first time. Dr. Ram has been hopping back and forth [9] from India for years promoting all-things-nonwoven. And every time he goes back to India – where cotton is big business -- Tech's name goes with him.

Dr. Ram made some cogent points today. In the story [10] I linked above, Tech's administrators talk plenty about wiggling its way into places like the Middle East, China and Europe ... but those markets are already saturated with American universities, Dr. Ram noted.

India, on the other hand, not so much.


The Tech/India duo is a match made in Heaven, he continued, because Lubbock and the country – the world's second-most-populous -- have cotton in common. What's more, Indian students start learning English as early as kindergarten and the two nations are close political allies.

So when you add it all up, the sum is opportunity.

Dr. Ram ain't kidding: India is clearly where Tech should be looking

Photos/Video

Photos:

 Cross section of a sample of Ramkumar's blockbuster invention: a decontamination wipe made of layered nonwoven cotton. (Photo courtesy of my sweet new iPhone 4) [11]

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Links:

[1] http://www.inda.org/india/CbeNWTC_FlyerAug2010.pdf

[2] <http://www.inda.org/>

[3] <http://www.inda.org/about/nonwovens.html>

[4] http://lubbockonline.com/stories/031009/loc_407367667.shtml

[5] <http://lubbockonline.com/local-news/2010-06-05/epa-oks-tech-cotton-oil-spill>

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[6] : <http://lubbockonline.com/local-news/2010-07-03/tech-stretching-wings-across-globe>

[7] <http://lubbockonline.com/insidehighered.com>

[8] <http://lubbockonline.com/chronicle.com>

[9] http://lubbockonline.com/stories/111509/loc_516713681.shtml

[10] <http://lubbockonline.com/local-news/2010-07-03/tech-stretching-wings-across-globe>

[11] http://lubbockonline.com/sites/default/files/photos/blogs/4241/cotton_wipe_3.JPG