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Threading new ties: Surat and Tiruppur explore collaboration to boost India's MMF trade

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Article Content:

As geopolitical tensions and US tariffs affect the global supply chain, businesses across the world are looking at new strategies to navigate the disruptions in trade. Against this

backdrop, industry associations from Tiruppur and Surat, two major textile clusters in India, are currently engaged in talks to explore mutual synergies that could enhance the man-made fibre (MMF) trade from the country.

Both clusters are renowned for their expertise in distinct segments of the textile trade. Surat is recognised as India's leading MMF manufacturing hub, while Tiruppur is widely known as the knitwear capital of the country.

Members from the Southern Gujarat Chamber of Commerce and Industry (SGCCI) in Surat are expected to visit Tiruppur between August and September this year to have a concrete discussion with the Tiruppur Exporters' Association (TEA) to deliberate further on the matter. "It has been initiated, and the agenda of the MoU will be discussed during our visit," said Ashish Gujarati, former president of SGCCI, in a conversation with ET Digital in Surat. "We are hopeful of signing an agreement a few months after that," he added.

The collaboration will entail Tiruppur exporters setting up a few units in Surat to gain first-hand experience in MMF garment production, while Surat exporters will have the opportunity to learn the nuances of the export culture from Tiruppur.

Tiruppur sources MMF fabric for the domestic market from Surat. Surat, conversely, has yet to establish its competence in export manufacturing.

According to Gujarati, such a collaboration can benefit the textile industry in India, not just for the clusters involved. "It will benefit textile trade overall, not just for Tiruppur or Surat. It can be a 100% win-win; we have investors ready to collaborate with Tiruppur on this initiative," he said.

Kumar Duraiswamy, Joint Secretary of TEA, confirmed that discussions are in progress, noting that Tiruppur can support Surat in identifying markets, understanding buyer standards, and determining fabric requirements to meet international standards, among other aspects. "These are nuances on which we can educate them. As far as we are concerned, we procure fabric for domestic manufacturing from Surat. It is about complementing each other; such mutual complementarity will benefit both sides," he said.

Duraiswamy expects MMF exports to go up by 20-25% in the next few years if such collaborations pick up momentum. Currently, China leads in MMF production, with an estimated global market share of 72%. India is the second-largest producer, with MMF contributing 17% of India's total textile exports.

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Experts in the industry indicate that a collaboration between Surat and Tiruppur could lead to significant growth in the MMF sector nationwide. “By improving product quality and variety, India can increase its share and reach a target of \$100+ billion in exports and global MMF trade, currently dominated by China. Each participating cluster benefits from the exchange of specialised knowledge and expertise—for instance, Surat enhances its export-readiness, while Tiruppur gains access to advanced manufacturing techniques in MMF. It will also contribute to increasing value addition within the country, thereby reducing reliance on imports and optimising overall productivity across the textile value chain,” Kanishk Maheshwari, Co-founder & MD, Primus Partners, said.

However, for these partnerships to be a success, there are certain on-the-ground challenges that must be addressed. Maheshwari noted that cross-regional partnerships face challenges due to lack of established communication platforms, competitive mindsets, and limited history of collaboration. “Without structured facilitation, trust-building and joint decision-making become slow and inefficient,” he explained.

Multi-cluster training and R&D centres should be developed, he said, with a focus on MMF textiles and garments. Besides this, facilitating access to technology, financial support for MSMEs, and cluster-specific policy initiatives can also help minimise the challenges that can arise.

Experts say the success of this strategic collaboration could serve as a model for other clusters to emulate and learn from. This can pave the way for more innovative thinking in the textile domain. Addressing the challenges while leveraging strengths is crucial for positioning India as a key player in the global MMF apparel value chain.