

US importers to have easier access to Indian handlooms

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Garment importers in US will find it easier to import Indian handloom goods, an Indian textile official said.

"Handlooms have been kept out of US quotas," said Vinod Malhotra, joint secretary, ministry of Textiles.

"But the main problem was that the US Customs would not allow handloom goods into the country as handloom items, saying these were subject to a quota restriction," he said.

"We were able to convince them of the large variety of products which handlooms can produce. Most of you who have been importing handloom will now be able to get Customs clearance more expeditiously," he said.

Malhotra was in the US to discuss issues affecting Indian garment traders in US and India and to chalk out plans to boost sale of handloom in the country.

The issues included import of woollen garments and the customs imposed restriction on Indian handloom goods.

Malhotra said India's textile export touched \$10 billion at the end of March 31, 1995, accounting for 37 percent of her total exports. The garment sector has registered phenomenal growth in the last four years, he added.

Speaking on the measures needed to improve export performance, he said "Importers here have an obligation to provide guidance and feedback on consumer preferences and requirements. They are the ones who know the

dynamics of the market and the departmental stores that buy garments. Such an exchange of views must take place on a regular basis."

He said the Indian government was trying to be more organized in exposing the variety of textiles that India has, be it natural or man-made fibers.

Malhotra suggested regular exhibitions, promotions, advertising and tieups with departmental stores and buying houses. "If the Indo-American Garment Association (IAGA) is willing to identify designers who are ready to come to our country and work with exporters, we are willing to participate in that."

He added that if the IAGA is willing to identify and launch promotional ventures for advertising, and shows presenting the products, then export promotion councils backed by the Indian government, will contribute financially.

Malhotra spoke of the need for the IAGA to create a secretariat here to correspond with the Indian government. "We will designate somebody who hears from you and is in a position to respond to you in good time."

Stressing on the need for a sustained campaign to push Indian garments in the competitive American market, Malhotra said, "Let us take up 1996 as the year in which a series of presentations and campaigns can be launched to tell America and the neighbouring countries of the kind of products India can produce and the kind of support possible from the country."

He said India has access to the best technology in the world and it is not as if importing the technology from the US or Europe presents a problem anymore. The last Exim policy introduced further innovations in the textile sector. He called for investments in technology in India, which would "broaden the base of our manufacturing activities in the country. This will improve overall quality."

Malhotra said that limitations in the field of software development and information technology in India prevent textile exports from undergoing a major increase. "Information technology needs to be strengthened in our country so that the response time between importer and exporter shortens. There is need for quick information on the kind of product, design, and pricing needed by the importer here."

The joint secretary said that vegetable dyes were fast replacing synthetic dyes. Germany has taken steps to ban certain synthetic dyes, probably with effect from January 1, 1996; it had banned benzidine a few years ago. "I do not know how long it will take the US to decide whether to go in for vegetable dyes or to continue with synthetic ones. But in the years to come vegetable dyes will occupy a prominent portion of the textiles in this country."

Malhotra added that commercial exploitation of these natural dyes has become possible with standardisation and fastness of colors.

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