

Thriving Through Challenges:

Driving Productivity and Sustainable Export Growth



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FROM PRESIDENT'S DESK

PMS Uppal
President, OGTC

I am pleased to place before my fellow exporters the next edition of our bi-annual newsletter. As the year moves forward, challenges somehow seem to grow; as if the headwinds due to the on-going West Asian and Ukraine conflict were not enough, we were surprised with the sudden hike in wages notified by the Haryana Govt followed by UP Govt. This unprecedented hike and the geo-political situation along with an extremely competitive export market has warranted serious steps to be taken by all of us to ensure survivability.

I have always maintained that continuous training alongside skilling, re-skilling and up- skilling are the touchstones to improve productivity and imbibe efficiency. Towards this end, I goad all members to take full advantage of the OGTC initiatives in the training of Quality Checkers, Supervisors, Middle Management and Operators. We need to promote multi-tasking, improve SAM and revisit all existing processes to achieve higher productivity.

Continuous interventions through Lean and ZED will go a long way to enhance efficiency and orderliness; it is relevant to note that in the near future more and more subsidies / financial support by both State and Central Govts will get linked to the levels of ZED certification achieved by industry.

The growing industrial environment in States like Bihar and Jharkhand will further impact the availability of manpower which is so very essential to upgrade our production targets to meet the new opportunities expected to be available once the UK and EU FTA's are operationalised during this year.

The recent visit of few members as part of delegation to Gwalior at the invitation of MP Industries Department is a step in the right direction so that we can evaluate the advantages of relocating; unfortunately, the PM Mitra Park at Hardoi, near Lucknow, does not seem to have moved ahead.

The relevancy of incorporating Industrial Relations as an inseparable part of Human Relations cannot be over emphasised – our HR Departments need to become more pro-active and involved in day-to-day operations so as to extract the best from employees in a pleasant environment.

This year our International Conference on Apparel & Home Textiles (ICAHT-2026) scheduled on 26th September 2026 at AEPC, Gurugram promises a bouquet of engaging and relevant subjects based on our theme “Unlock New Pathways for Sustainable Growth in International Markets”. I urge all members to ensure active participation to derive maximum advantage of the proceedings.

As I conclude, I do foresee a promising future for our industry notwithstanding the current challenges provided we keep our heads high and work towards a resilient tomorrow.



Dr. A Sakthivel
Chairman, AEPC

Apparel Export Promotion Council



(Sponsored by Govt. of India, Ministry of Textiles)

MESSAGE

On behalf of AEPC, I extend my warm greetings and best wishes to OGTC and all its members.

OGTC has always been a shining example of how a small yet dynamic organization can achieve significant milestones through consistent efforts and meaningful initiatives. Over the years, OGTC has demonstrated unwavering commitment to driving positive change through cluster developments and knowledge-sharing in the apparel manufacturing and export industry.

OGTC's initiatives have consistently been forward-looking, focusing on key global trends and emerging opportunities that help the industry remain competitive in an evolving international marketplace.

OGTC has always played a proactive role in supporting cluster-based MSMEs. For many years, the cluster has been working relentlessly in the areas of capacity building, compliance enhancement, and improving the overall competitiveness of garment exporters through training, networking, and strategic partnerships across the supply chain. It is a matter of great pride that OGTC continues its dedicated efforts to take the industry to newer heights.

Under the visionary leadership of our Hon'ble Prime Minister, India has successfully entered into several Free Trade Agreements (FTAs), Bilateral Trade Agreements (BTAs), and other strategic treaties with countries across the globe. These developments have strengthened global confidence in India and created positive sentiments towards Indian trade and industry. There are totally 38 countries FTA and this decade is going to be for apparel and textiles.

In the context of the various FTAs, BTAs, and other trade agreements, OGTC's role in creating awareness among its members about these important government initiatives is both timely and crucial. We wish the entire OGTC team great success in its mission to empower the industry and maximize the benefits arising from these opportunities.

I also extend my best wishes for the successful publication of OGTC's Newsletter, which serves as a valuable source of information and guidance for the exporting community.





COST OPTIMISATION IN APPAREL MANUFACTURING EXPORT INDUSTRIES

Col. S. Kapoor

Director General, OGTC

Cost optimisation in apparel manufacturing for export markets requires a structured, end-to-end approach that aligns sourcing, production efficiency, compliance and market responsiveness. The objective is not merely cost reduction but sustainable cost competitiveness without compromising quality, timelines or compliance.

Raw Material Optimization This constitutes the largest cost component (50–60%). The interventions include: -

- Vendor consolidation and long-term contracts to secure better pricing and consistency.
- Regional sourcing to reduce logistics costs and lead times.
- Material utilisation efficiency through improved marker planning, fabric width optimisation and reduced wastage.
- Adopting alternative fabrics and blends that meet buyer specifications at lower cost.

Manufacturing Efficiency and Lean Practices

- Implementation of lean manufacturing principles to eliminate non-value-added activities.
- Line balancing, motion study and time benchmarking to enhance productivity.
- Use of modular production systems to improve flexibility and reduce throughput time.
- training to improve operator efficiency and reduce rejection rates.

Technology Adoption

- Deployment of ERP systems for better planning, inventory control and sampling efficiency.
- in cutting and finishing processes.
- Use of AI-based demand forecasting and production planning to reduce overproduction and idle capacity.
- Digital sampling and 3D prototyping to cut development costs and time.

Energy and Utility Cost Management

- Transition to renewable energy resources to reduce long-term energy costs.
- Investment in energy-efficient machinery and process optimisation.
- Monitoring systems for water, steam and electricity usage to identify inefficiencies.

Supply Chain and Logistics Optimization

- Consolidating shipments to reduce freight costs.
- Improved demand forecasting to minimise air shipments.
- Collaboration with logistics partners for better freight contracts.

Compliance and Waste Reduction

- Proactive compliance with environmental and social standards to avoid penalties, rejections or shipment delays.
- Reduction of rework and defects through quality assurance systems.
- Recycling and reuse of fabric waste and water.
- Alignment with circular economy practices to reduce long-term input costs.

Product and Design Rationalization

- Focus on value engineering.
- Standardisation of trims and accessories across styles.
- Early collaboration with buyers to align cost targets and design feasibility.

Workforce Productivity and Retention

- Skill development programs to improve efficiency and reduce dependency on highly specialised labour.
- Incentive-based productivity systems to align worker output with organisational goals.
- Reduction in attrition through better working conditions, employee engagement and lowering retraining costs.

Financial and Policy Leverage

- Effective utilisation of export incentives such as RoDTEP, RoSCTL and state-level subsidies.
- Duty optimisation through FTAs.

Cost optimisation in apparel exports is increasingly linked to agility, sustainability and compliance. Buyers are shifting toward suppliers who can demonstrate not only competitive pricing but also transparency, speed and environmental responsibility.

A balanced approach-combining lean operations, digital transformation and sustainable practices-ensures enduring competitiveness in global apparel markets.



OGTC ACTIVITIES

MEETING WITH SHRI BHUPENDER YADAV

Our delegation comprising of the following met Shri Bhupender Yadav, Hon'ble Minister of Environment, Forest and Climate Change on 14th January 2026: -

- Mr. Mandeep Wasu
- Dr. Animesh Saxena
- Col. S. Kapoor



The aim of the meeting was to highlight our concern on the following: -

- a) Classification of apparel industry as RED.
- b) Govt orders for installation of Online Continuous Emission Monitoring Systems (OCEMS) and PTZ Cameras in apparel industry amongst others, notwithstanding the fact that all of them are using PNG based boilers which is clean fuel.

The Hon'ble Minister assured the delegation to get the matter examined at the earliest.

WORKSHOP ON DRAFT RULES UNDER NEW LABOUR CODES

A half-day workshop on the draft rules related to the New Labour Codes was conducted at Faridabad on 15th January 2026 by Mr. SK Gupta, Advocate, Supreme Court.

Total 27 delegates from 15 member companies participated.



The workshop was very informative and interactive; subsequently based on the inputs received, OGTC shared its objections / suggestions with the appropriate authorities.

OGTC 22ND FOUNDERS' DAY

OGTC celebrated its 22nd Founders' Day on 4th May 2026 by organizing a gala dinner at Friends Club (W), New Delhi for the members and their spouses.



20 Members and their spouses attended; it provided an excellent opportunity for all including spouses to interact in a relaxed and informal environment.

DELEGATION VISIT : GWALIOR, MADHYA PRADESH

A combined delegation from OGTC and GEMA visited Gwalior on 23rd May 2026 for meeting with Madhya Pradesh Industries Department. Ms Anisha Shrivastav, IAS, Executive Director, MPIDC interacted with the delegates.

Our following member companies were part of the delegation: -

- M/s FashionC Overseas Export Pvt Ltd
- M/s General Commerce Ltd
- M/s Instyle Retails Inc.
- M/s Neetee Apparel LLP
- M/s Orient Fashion Exports India Pvt Ltd
- M/s Pee Empro Exports Pvt Ltd
- M/s Pooja International
- M/s Trend Setters International



The purpose of the visit was to understand the offer of the State Govt for setting-up apparel units in and around Gwalior. The delegation visited the Readymade Garment Park, Gwalior which is developed and operational along with Incubation Center at Gwalior. It also visited the Mohana Industrial park which is under development and located approx. 40 Km from Gwalior.

TEXTILE UTSAV, SURAT

Textile Utsav was held in Surat from 1st to 3rd June 2026. It was a Fabric Expo which brought together leading fabric manufacturers from across the country including Surat, Ahmedabad, Mumbai, Bangalore, Delhi, Varanasi, and Jaipur under one roof.



OGTC was associated with the exhibition. Teams from Fabrics / Sourcing Department from the following companies visited the exhibition during this period: -

- M/s Afflatus International
- M/s FashionC Overseas Exports Pvt Ltd
- M/s Genus Apparels Ltd
- M/s Gudi Exports Pvt Ltd
- M/s New Delhi Export House
- M/s Neetee Apparel LLP
- M/s OFB Tech Pvt Ltd
- M/s Pee Empro Exports Pvt Ltd
- M/s Radnik Exports Global Pvt Ltd
- M/s Rainbow Fabart Pvt Ltd
- M/s Sonu Exim Pvt Ltd
- M/s Team Krian
- M/s Trend Setters International
- OGTC

“THE SILENT SALESPERSON” BRANDING SEMINAR

Okhla Garment & Textile Cluster (OGTC), hosted “The Silent Salesperson”, a branding seminar for cluster members in collaboration with Beryl Agency.

The session was led by Prashant Gupta, Founder of Beryl Agency and Co-Founder of HireDesigners, and Akshat Raghava, Co-Founder and Creative Director of Beryl Agency and HireDesigners. The discussion focused on a shift in global buyer behaviour, where international buyers increasingly discover and evaluate suppliers through digital presence, capabilities and credibility before the first interaction. With AI-assisted procurement tools becoming part of the shortlisting process, branding is increasingly influencing visibility and trust.



The session encouraged manufacturers to view branding not as a marketing exercise, but as a business development asset. It highlighted how Indian manufacturers, after decades of building products for global brands, must also strengthen their own identity and recall.

Through this initiative, OGTC provided a platform for members to reflect on branding, buyer discovery and the future competitiveness of Indian textile exporters.

LEAN TRAINING PROGRAMME

Lean Training Programme Lean DSR, Phase I audit has been successfully completed for the Faridabad cluster i.e M/s Panorama Exports Pvt Ltd & M/s Pee Empro Exports Pvt Ltd. The Second phase of lean training is progress in Faridabad.

The second phase application for the Noida Cluster, comprising M/s Radnik Global Exports, M/s Rainbow Fabart and M/s Sonu Exim and Gurugram cluster comprising M/s Radnik Export Global Pvt Ltd, M/s Afflatus International & M/s Neetee Apparel LLP is in the process of being approved.

The training programme is expected to commence shortly under the aegis of M/s Fashion Futures upon receiving the formal go-ahead from Quality Council of India.

MAN MACHINE RATIO

The unprecedented hike in minimum wages announced by Haryana and Uttar Pradesh Govts along with geopolitical scenario affecting our exports has thrown up a challenging environment for our industry. During the Owners meeting on 14th April 2026, the ibid issue was discussed in detail and it was felt that our members need to promote efficiency and productivity as main pillars for survival. Accordingly, a decision was taken to benchmark MMR of our members; data has been received from the following and has since been shared: -

1. M/s Afflatus International
2. M/s FashionC Overseas Exports Pvt Ltd
3. M/s Gudi Exports Pvt Ltd
4. M/s Neetee Apparel LLP
5. M/s Orient Fashion Exports India Pvt Ltd
6. M/s Pee Empro Exports Pvt Ltd
7. M/s Rainbow Fabart Pvt Ltd
8. M/s Radnik Exports Global Pvt Ltd

ROUND TABLE MEETING WITH MR. JOACHIM HENSCH, GERMAN CONSULTANT

A round table interaction with Mr. Joachim Hensch, German Consultant was held on Monday 22nd June 2026.

Mr. Joachim Hensch shared his thoughts and experience to help apparel manufacturers move from traditional production environment to faster, smarter and more profitable digital lean factories.



During the course of discussion and interaction Mr. Hensch highlighted and explained from where factories earn money and where they burn money and as a follow up he turned that insight into a realistic roadmap for transformation. The meeting was attended by 10 member companies.

AWARENESS SESSIONS ON “CATEGORIZATION OF SKILL SETS”

ATDC conducted two awareness session programs on “Identification of Skill Sets for Various Job Roles” for OGTC member factories at ATDC Gurugram and ATDC Noida on 20th May & 5th June 2026 respectively. The sessions were organized following a request from OGTC to support its member factories in understanding the categorization of job roles into Unskilled, Semi-Skilled, Skilled, and Highly Skilled categories as per the new Labour Code norms and relevant Rules.

Under the leadership of Prof. Dr. Roopak Vasishtha, Director General & CEO, ATDC (Pro –up) continues to strengthen industry engagement through knowledge-sharing initiatives aimed at supporting the apparel sector. The sessions were addressed by Dr. Roopali Shukla, Director ATDC (Pro-Up & CSR), who provided valuable insights on the practical application of skill categorization across departments.



The program focused on Understanding the Four Grades, Department Wise Skill Mapping, Skill-set Evaluation Methodology with structured mathematical methods of Skills Assessment. Participants gained practical insights into skill categorization to support effective implementation of the revised norms.

The sessions were attended by 44 participants, including HR Heads, Operations Heads, COOs, and Heads of Departments from OGTC member factories such as Matrix Design & Industries Pvt. Ltd., Orient Fashion Exports, Trend Setters International, Indigo Crafts Pvt. Ltd., Panorama Exports, Radnik Exports Global Pvt. Ltd., Pee Empro Exports Pvt. Ltd., Neetee Apparel LLP, Afflatus International, Ishman International, Pooja International, Fancy Fashions, New Delhi Export House, Rainbow Fabart Pvt. Ltd., Meenu Creation LLP, Paramount Products Pvt. Ltd., Sonu Exim Pvt. Ltd., and Team Krian.



ATDC expresses its gratitude to OGTC for taking this initiative, which will help member factories strengthen their understanding and facilitate the smooth implementation of the revised norms across their organizations.

After the conclusion of workshop, the outcome was shared with respective State Govts with the request to include the same appropriately in the final rules as and when notified.



GLIMPSES OF CSR ACTIVITIES OF OGTC MEMBER COMPANIES (JANUARY TO JUNE 2026)

DAY WITH SOCIETY AT UDAYAN CARE AT M/S AFFLATUS INTERNATIONAL



WOMEN'S DAY CELEBRATION AT M/S OFB TECH LTD



EYE CHECK-UP CAMP AT M/S SONU EXIM PVT LTD



COMMUNITY FEAST AT M/S SONU EXIM PVT LTD



NATIONAL GIRL CHILD DAY CELEBRATION AT M/S PARAMOUNT PRODUCTS PVT LTD



WORLD CANCER DAY AT M/S PARAMOUNT PRODUCTS PVT LTD



DISTRIBUTION OF LPG CYLINDER TO EMPLOYEES IN M/S ORIENT FASHION EXPORTS INDIA PVT LTD



RISE CERTIFICATION SUPPORT PROGRAMME AT M/S ORIENT FASHION EXPORTS INDIA PVT LTD



EYE SCREENING CAMP AT M/S POOJA INTERNATIONAL



BLANKET DISTRIBUTION AT M/S PEE EMPRO EXPORTS PVT LTD



AWARENESS SESSION ON MENSTRUAL HYGIENE AT M/S PEE EMPRO EXPORTS PVT LTD



WOMEN'S DAY CELEBRATION AT M/S RADNIK EXPORTS GLOBAL PVT LTD





HR Leadership in the Apparel Industry: From Manpower Management to Strategic Value Creation

Ankit Kaushik

Group Vice President
Human Resources, Paramount Group

The apparel industry remains one of the most people-intensive sectors in India, employing millions across manufacturing units, supply chains, and support functions. While technology, automation, and global competition continue to reshape the industry, one constant remains unchanged—**people are at the heart of apparel manufacturing**. Over my two decades of experience in this sector, I have witnessed a significant transformation in the role of Human Resources—from a largely administrative and compliance-driven function to a strategic enabler of business performance.

Understanding the Unique HR Landscape of Apparel Manufacturing

Unlike many other industries, apparel manufacturing operates on thin margins, high volume, and strict delivery timelines. Managing a large and diverse workforce—often including migrant labor—poses unique challenges such as high attrition, skill gaps, industrial relations sensitivities, and stringent buyer compliance requirements. HR leaders in this industry must therefore strike a delicate balance between operational efficiency and people-centric practices.

The traditional approach of focusing only on hiring and payroll is no longer sufficient. Today's HR function must actively contribute to productivity enhancement, workforce stability, and organizational culture.

Industrial Relations: From Conflict Management to Trust Building

Industrial relations have always been a critical pillar of HR in the apparel sector. In my experience, sustainable IR cannot be achieved through reactive measures. **It requires continuous engagement, transparent communication, and proactive issue resolution.**

Building trust with workers, supervisors, and union representatives is far more effective than managing disputes after they arise. Open-door policies, structured grievance redressal mechanisms, and leadership presence on the shop floor go a long way in fostering industrial harmony. Strong IR is not just about compliance—it directly impacts productivity, quality, and business continuity.

Talent Management Beyond White-Collar Roles

One of the most overlooked aspects of HR in apparel manufacturing is talent development at the shop-floor and middle-management levels. Supervisors, line leaders, and production managers play a crucial role in translating business goals into operational outcomes.

Organizations that invest in:

- Skill development and multi-skilling initiatives
- Leadership grooming for frontline managers
- Clear career progression paths

are better positioned to reduce attrition and build a loyal, high-performing workforce. Talent management in the apparel industry must be inclusive and extend beyond corporate offices to the factory floor.

Compliance as a Strategic Enabler

Labor law compliance and buyer audits are often viewed as challenges or cost centers. However, with the right mindset, compliance can become a strategic advantage. My background in law has reinforced my belief that compliance, when embedded into HR systems and processes, enhances credibility with buyers, protects the organization from risk, and strengthens employer branding.

In today's environment, compliance is closely linked to ESG expectations, ethical sourcing, and sustainability. HR leaders must work closely with operations and leadership teams to ensure that statutory and social compliance is not an afterthought but an integral part of business strategy.

The Evolving Role of HR as a Strategic Partner

Modern HR leaders must move beyond transactional responsibilities and actively participate in business decision-making. Data-driven workforce planning, productivity-linked HR metrics, and alignment of people strategy with organizational goals are now essential.

At Paramount Group, our focus has been on integrating HR with business priorities—whether it is expansion, operational efficiency, or cultural transformation. HR today must act as a change agent, enabling organizations to adapt to evolving market conditions while keeping employees engaged and motivated.

Continuous Learning: Preparing HR for the Future

The business environment is changing rapidly, and HR leadership must continuously evolve to stay relevant. My decision to pursue the CHRO program at XLRI, Jamshedpur, stems from the belief that strategic HR leadership requires a strong understanding of business, governance, and future workforce trends.

The future of HR in the apparel industry will demand leaders who can combine empathy with execution, compliance with competitiveness, and people focus with performance outcomes.

Conclusion

The apparel industry's success is deeply intertwined with its people. HR leaders have a critical role to play in shaping resilient organizations that can thrive amid uncertainty. By focusing on trust-based industrial relations, inclusive talent development, strategic compliance, and continuous learning, HR can truly become a driver of sustainable growth.

As the industry evolves, HR must not merely support the business—it must help **lead it forward**.





Women Safety at Workplace: A Holistic Approach to Preparedness

Monika Raghav

Ex-CHRO | People & Culture | ESG | Workplace Inclusion

Sometimes, an incident changes the way we think about workplace responsibility.

Whenever I think of Women Safety at Workplace, I recall two stories.

In one, an organisation receives distressing news that a woman employee faced misbehaviour and an attempted assault while returning home from work. Beyond the immediate concern for her safety, one uncomfortable question remains in everyone's mind: *Could we have done something more to prepare or support her?*

Then there is another story, one that still gives me a sense of pride.

A woman employee from one of my previous organisations was returning home when she found herself cornered on the road by two strangers. Frightened, but alert, she remembered the women safety awareness sessions conducted in the organisation and used the pepper spray shared during one of our initiatives. She protected herself, drew attention, and the matter reached the authorities.

Later, when she thanked the organisation for standing by women employees through awareness and preparedness, it felt like a proud moment for all of us, because preparation had helped someone when she needed confidence the most.

That experience reinforced one belief for me: **women safety cannot be viewed in parts. It requires holistic preparedness.**

In the garment and textile sector, where women form a significant part of the workforce, safety starts from the moment a woman leaves home for work and continues through commuting, workplace interactions, emergency preparedness, and safe return home.

For many women workers, as well as staff members, commuting itself brings anxiety. Long travel hours, isolated stretches, early shifts, and late exits can affect confidence and peace of mind.

Better lighting near entry and exit points, visible emergency contacts, awareness sessions, anonymous QR based reporting mechanisms, and where feasible, verified transport arrangements can make a meaningful difference.

Inside the workplace, safety is equally about dignity and comfort. Washroom pathways should remain clear, well lit, and comfortable to access. During shift changes, lunch breaks, and movement hours, the presence of both male and female security personnel, supported by a security supervisor, can build reassurance.

Another important area is emergency preparedness. In garment factories, many women wear sarees, suits, dupattas, or loose fitting garments that may create additional risk during fire emergencies. Practical drills and repeated awareness sessions matter.

In one organisation, we scheduled women safety sessions regularly. While some saw it as productive time lost, many production leads & teams planned it smartly around pre planned preventive maintenance schedules or line changeovers, recognising that safety, trust, confidence, and retention are deeply connected.

Women safety at Workplace is about care, preparedness, and creating confidence.

Because when women feel safe, workplaces become stronger.



Tough Times Do not Last, Efficient Organizations Do

Sunaina Khanna

Managing Director

Methods Apparel Consultancy India Pvt. Ltd.

The apparel industry in NCR Delhi is passing through one of its most challenging phases in recent years. Labour wages across the region have increased significantly, while the availability of migrant workers is steadily reducing as new garment manufacturing hubs emerge in Bihar, Jharkhand, Odisha, and soon West Bengal. At the same time, global economic uncertainty has intensified pressure from international buyers, who are demanding lower prices, faster deliveries, smaller order quantities, and consistently high quality standards.

For garment manufacturers, the ability to produce more with the same resources has become critical for long-term survival and profitability.

Many factories continue to face hidden operational losses in areas such as production planning, line balancing, workflow movement, operator utilization, quality management, and machine handling. These inefficiencies increase production costs, reduce output, create delivery delays, and directly impact profitability. While external factors like labour costs may be beyond control, improving internal factory efficiency is completely achievable.

This is where **Methods Apparel Consultancy** can support NCR Delhi manufacturers in building stronger and future-ready operations. With extensive industry experience and practical implementation expertise, Methods focuses on identifying operational gaps and converting them into measurable productivity improvements.

Methods helps organizations optimize production systems through scientific line balancing, industrial engineering practices, workflow improvement, operator performance enhancement, and real-time production monitoring. By introducing data-driven visibility and systematic controls on the factory floor, management teams can make faster and more effective decisions. The result is improved productivity, lower manufacturing cost, reduced bottlenecks, better quality performance, and faster order execution.

Today's buyers are increasingly looking for manufacturing partners who can offer speed, flexibility, consistency, and transparency. Factories that continue to rely only on low labour cost advantages may struggle to remain competitive in the coming years. On the other hand, organizations that invest in productivity improvement and operational excellence will be better positioned to handle market fluctuations and buyer expectations.

The future of the garment industry will belong to manufacturers who work smarter, faster, and more efficiently. Efficiency and Productivity are no longer optional — they are the foundation of long-term success. Methods Apparel Consultancy remains committed to partnering with manufacturers in this transformation journey by helping them build leaner, more productive, and globally competitive operations.





India's FTA Window: A Strategic Inflection Point for Apparel Exports

Varun Vaid

Chief Business Director
Wazir Advisors Pvt. Ltd

India's apparel export story is shifting - not incrementally, but structurally. For decades, the constraint was not capacity or workforce depth; it was access. Indian exporters operated under MFN tariffs while key competing nations enjoyed zero-duty entry into the same markets. That structural disadvantage is now being dismantled.

A New Trade Architecture

Between 2022 and 2026, India has concluded or substantially advanced trade agreements covering seven markets: the EU, UK, EFTA, Australia, UAE, Oman, and New Zealand. In addition, trade agreements with Japan and South Korea were already in place for over ten years. Together, these nine markets absorb over USD 177 bn of global apparel imports annually. For exporters who have long priced their products at a tariff disadvantage, the shift matters.

The immediate effect is the removal of tariff handicaps. Indian apparel previously faced 9.6–12% duties in markets where Bangladesh and Cambodia entered at zero duty. Under the new portfolio, India competes on level tariff terms in Australia, UAE, Oman, and EFTA — all in force — with the UK FTA (EIF expected within 2026) and New Zealand (signed April 2026, EIF pending DGFT notification) following shortly. EU access, with EIF expected in early 2027, completes the European picture. Tariff parity does not guarantee volume growth, but it removes the largest single barrier that has held Indian share below the country's supply capability.

The China+1 Imperative

The more durable tailwind for India is structural, not cyclical. Western buyers have spent the last three years actively reducing sourcing concentration in China, driven by geopolitical risk, supply chain resilience mandates, and, increasingly, due diligence obligations under emerging forced labour legislation. Vietnam and Bangladesh have absorbed the first wave of that redistribution. India, held back by tariff disadvantage, captured relatively little of it. With FTA-driven parity now in place, Indian exporters enter that conversation on equal commercial terms for the first time. The China+1 opportunity does not expire - but the window to establish buyer relationships and programme depth before competitors consolidate their positions is finite.

From Access to Activation

Opportunity, however, is not evenly distributed. Near-term gains sit in India's cotton-strength categories: T-shirts, woven shirts, dresses, blouses, baby apparel, and nightwear. Indian exporters already hold meaningful share across several FTA markets in these segments. The man-made fibre opportunity is larger in absolute terms but requires synthetic capacity investment that takes years to build - it is a medium-term story, not a near-term one.

The sequencing logic for Indian exporters is clear. Activate the UK immediately: the FTA is imminent and volume currently sourced from Turkey is being redistributed now. Treat Australia as the cleanest near-term execution market - the compliance burden is light and the FTA is operational. Bundle UAE and Oman as a single Gulf programme. Extend EFTA through existing EU buyer relationships at near-zero incremental cost. Treat the EU as a compliance investment horizon for 2026–27, not a sales target for this quarter. And across all markets, prioritise Rules of Origin compliance - it is the single biggest determinant of whether tariff savings convert into actual landed-cost advantage at the buyer's door.

India's FTA portfolio is not a guarantee of growth. It is, finally, a level field. Whether the industry captures that opportunity in the next 24–36 months - or watches competitors move faster again - depends entirely on execution.

ICAHT-2026

**21ST INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON APPAREL & HOME TEXTILES
ON 26TH SEPTEMBER 2026 AT AEPC, GURUGRAM**

THEME: UNLOCK NEW PATHWAYS FOR SUSTAINABLE GROWTH IN INTERNATIONAL MARKETS

DRAFT CONFERENCE PROGRAMME

Inaugural Session

Theme Presentation

Unlocking New Pathways for Sustainable Growth in International Markets

This presentation will set the strategic context for the conference by assessing India's current position in the global T&A landscape. It will cover evolving global market dynamics, emerging buyer expectations, and India's relative competitiveness. The session will also highlight key gaps in India's ecosystem and outline a forward-looking roadmap to strengthen its positioning as a preferred sourcing destination.

Presentation 1

Improving Productivity in Apparel Manufacturing: What High Performing Factories Differently

This session will focus on practical approaches used by high-performing factories to improve productivity. Discussion areas will include production discipline, supervisory capability, training systems, worker engagement, process improvement, and shopfloor management practices that help factories move toward higher efficiency levels.

Fire Side Chat

Decoding Global Competitiveness: Why Productivity Will Define the Next Growth Wave in Apparel Exports

As global apparel trade becomes more competitive, productivity is emerging as one of the most important determinants of success. In an environment shaped by rising costs, tighter delivery expectations, and increasing pressure on margins, manufacturers can no longer rely on scale or market access alone. This session will explore why productivity improvement must now sit at the center of competitiveness, and how stronger factory performance, better manpower systems, and sharper operational execution can help exporters build resilience and unlock the next phase of growth.

Presentation 2

Managing Manpower in High Performing Factories

Presentation 3

International Perspectives: Lessons from High-Performing Apparel Manufacturing Ecosystems

This session will bring international perspectives on how competing manufacturing hubs are improving productivity, workforce capability, training infrastructure, and factory systems. The objective is to draw practical lessons from countries and companies that are already ahead on execution and performance.

Presentation 4

Digital First: Integrating Technology to Improve Productivity

As factories operate in an increasingly cost-competitive and performance-driven environment, the role of technology in improving productivity has become more critical than ever. This session will explore how digital tools, automation, integrated data systems, and smarter production technologies can help manufacturers improve visibility, reduce inefficiencies, strengthen decision-making, and enhance overall factory performance. The discussion will focus on how technology can be used not as a standalone investment, but as a practical enabler of productivity improvement across operations.

Concluding Session



CONFERENCE ANNOUNCEMENT ICAHT-2026

21ST INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON APPAREL & HOME TEXTILES

ON 26TH SEPTEMBER 2026 AT AEPC, GURUGRAM

THEME: UNLOCK NEW PATHWAYS FOR SUSTAINABLE GROWTH IN INTERNATIONAL MARKETS

A BRIEF INTRODUCTION ABOUT OGTC

The Okhla Garment & Textile Cluster (OGTC), established in 2004, is a pioneering collective of apparel exporters located in the Delhi-NCR region. It represents a unique cluster of industry leaders united not merely by geographical proximity, but by shared vision, common objectives, and collaborative growth initiatives.

OGTC's mission is to enhance the global competitiveness of India's apparel industry by fostering innovation, sustainability, productivity enhancement, and collective progress. The cluster actively promotes initiatives aimed at reducing carbon emissions in the garment sector, reflecting its strong commitment towards sustainable and responsible manufacturing practices. Till date, OGTC members have collectively reduced nearly 2000 tons of carbon footprint and continue to work towards the long-term objective of achieving carbon neutrality.

Recognizing the growing need for operational excellence and global competitiveness, OGTC is taking significant strides in promoting Lean Manufacturing practices, ZED (Zero Defect Zero Effect) Certification, and productivity improvement programmes among its member units. The cluster continuously encourages adoption of best manufacturing practices to improve efficiency, optimize resources, reduce wastage, and strengthen overall competitiveness.

The cluster serves as an effective platform for synergy and knowledge sharing amongst members by facilitating regular interactions, workshops, awareness programmes, and collaborative industry initiatives.

Beyond industrial and environmental initiatives, OGTC remains deeply committed to women empowerment in the garment sector. Recognizing the vital contribution of women employees, workers, supervisors, designers, and leaders, the cluster strongly supports inclusive growth and workforce participation. Member units collectively provide gainful employment opportunities to over 50,000 women workforce across various functions of the apparel value chain.

OGTC also plays a pivotal role in knowledge dissemination, policy advocacy, and industry-academia collaboration through various national and international forums, seminars and flagship events such as the International Conference on Apparel & Home Textiles (ICAHT).

ABOUT OGTC CONFERENCE

These conferences provide valuable insights into the evolving global landscape of apparel manufacturing, India's strategic role and the growing impact of digital innovation in the industry. It also provides an environment for academicians, researchers and practitioners to exchange ideas on recent developments in the field of apparel manufacturing.

20th International Conference on Apparel & Home Textiles (ICAHT-2025) was held in collaboration with AEPC, Gurugram on 20th September 2025. It was a matter of pride for us with over 400 delegates different Manufacturing Units, Institutions, Consulting firms along with renowned professional speakers attended the day-long proceedings which included 3 Panel Discussions and 2 Presentations.

For further details, if any, contact:

ORGANIZING COMMITTEE:

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