



CHAIRMAN'S SPEECH

Speech by
Padma Shri Dr. A. Sakthivel,
Chairman, AEPC
at
47th AEPC ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING
on
09th September 2026
Through Video Conferencing



Dear Members and Friends,

It gives me immense pleasure to welcome all of you to the 47th Annual General Meeting of the Apparel Export Promotion Council.

On behalf of the Executive Committee of AEPC and on my personal behalf, I extend a warm welcome to all the members and distinguished participants joining us today.

The Notice convening this Annual General Meeting, along with the Annual Report and the Audited Financial Statements for the financial year ended 31st March 2026, has already been circulated to the members. With your permission, I take the same as read.

FRIENDS,

The year under review has been a period of both challenges and opportunities for the Indian apparel industry. The global business environment remained uncertain due to geopolitical developments, disruptions in supply chains, changing tariff structures, inflationary pressures in major markets and evolving sustainability and compliance requirements.

However, the Indian apparel industry has once again demonstrated its resilience, adaptability and ability to respond to changing global scenario.

During FY 2025–26, India's Readymade Garment exports stood at approximately USD 15.8 billion. The performance of the sector must be viewed in the context of the challenging global environment and changing sourcing dynamics.

The experience of the past year has once again reminded us that, in an increasingly competitive and uncertain global marketplace, we must continuously strengthen our competitiveness and diversify both our markets and product basket.

NAVIGATING THE CHANGING GLOBAL TRADE ENVIRONMENT

Friends, the global apparel trade landscape is undergoing significant changes. Traditional sourcing patterns are evolving. Buyers are increasingly looking for supply chains that are reliable, diversified, responsive, sustainable and compliant with international standards.

The year also witnessed considerable uncertainty regarding international tariff regimes, particularly developments relating to the United States market. As the apparel sector is highly labour-intensive and largely driven by MSMEs, changes in tariff structures and market-access conditions have a direct impact on our competitiveness, employment and exports.



AEPC remained actively engaged with the Government of India and other stakeholders to bring the concerns of the apparel industry to the forefront.

The Council participated in important consultations and interactions concerning tariff-related developments and consistently highlighted the need to safeguard the competitiveness of the Indian apparel industry.

Heaving said that, we must recognise that every disruption in global trade also creates new opportunities.

India has an opportunity to strengthen its position as a reliable and trusted sourcing partner. To seize this opportunity, we need to move faster in the areas of market diversification, product diversification, technology adoption, sustainability and improve speed-to-the market.

FREE TRADE AGREEMENTS – NEW OPPORTUNITIES FOR INDIAN APPAREL

Friends, we are entering an important phase in India's trade journey. The Free Trade Agreements concluded and those under negotiation have the potential to redraw the map of opportunities for Indian apparel exports.

I firmly believe that the coming decade can be the decade of the Indian Apparel Export Fraternity, driven by the expanding network of Free Trade Agreements and the unprecedented market-access opportunities they are creating for our industry.

These agreements are not merely instruments for tariff reduction; they are gateways to new markets, investments, technologies and stronger global partnerships. The operation of India–UK and India–EFTA Agreements are important milestones, while the ongoing India–EU FTA negotiations hold particular significance for the Indian apparel industry, given the European Union's importance as a major destination for our exports. A comprehensive and mutually beneficial agreement with the EU could provide a significant boost to India's competitiveness and open new avenues for growth.

AEPC will continue to work with the Government and the industry to ensure that our exporters are able to effectively utilise the opportunities created through these agreements.

MAJOR HIGHLIGHTS OF AEPC ACTIVITIES DURING THE YEAR

Friends, during the year, AEPC continued to work actively towards addressing industry concerns, facilitating exports, strengthening engagement with the Government and expanding India's presence in global markets. Some of the key highlights of the Council's activities during the year are as follows:-



- Active policy advocacy and engagement with the Government on key issues affecting the apparel export sector, including market access, tariff-related challenges, RoSCTL, Duty Drawback, export credit, Customs and ease of doing business.
- Strengthening trade facilitation initiatives, including the launch of the Thunaivan Portal at Tirupur for facilitating the resolution of Customs-related issues faced by exporters.
- Organisation of the 73rd and 74th India International Garment Fairs, providing Indian apparel exporters an important platform to showcase their products and connect with overseas buyers.
- Focus on market and product diversification, including engagement with the Government and industry stakeholders on expanding India's presence in emerging markets and strengthening the MMF and other high-growth apparel segments.
- Promotion of technology and digital transformation through programmes and initiatives relating to Artificial Intelligence, e-commerce, digital business, fashion forecasting and other emerging areas.
- Greater emphasis on sustainability and responsible manufacturing, through programmes covering ESG, traceability, Life Cycle Assessment, Product Carbon Footprint, Greenhouse Gas emissions and Digital Product Passports.
- Capacity-building and knowledge initiatives for exporters on trade, finance, compliance, technology, sustainability and emerging global market requirements.
- Enhanced digital trade facilitation, including AEPC's authorisation for electronic issuance of Preferential Certificates of Origin under APTA and SAPTA through the DGFT portal.

International Engagement through Trade Shows and Overseas Events

- Participation in Barcelona Textile Expo, Spain, strengthening engagement with buyers and exploring opportunities in the European market.
- Participation in the 16th India Trend Fair, Tokyo, showcasing India's capabilities across apparel, sustainable textiles and related product categories.



- Organisation of the India–Japan CEO Roundtable – “India–Japan: Weaving the Future Together”, in collaboration with the Ministry of Textiles and Invest India, focusing on opportunities in sourcing, investment, innovation and sustainability.
- Participation in Sourcing at MAGIC, Las Vegas, facilitating engagement between Indian exporters and international buyers in the important US market.
- Participation in Trends Expo International Fashion Fair at Lodz, Poland, further strengthening India's outreach in the European market.
- Participation in CPM Moscow, exploring business opportunities and strengthening engagement with the Russian market.
- Participation in the India–UK Textile Dialogue Roadshow in London, following the signing of the India–UK Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement, focusing on sourcing, investment, sustainability and strengthening buyer confidence in Indian supply chains.

Even after the close of the financial year, AEPC continued its efforts to promote the Indian apparel industry on the global stage. Bharat Tex 2026, held in July 2026, was another significant milestone, providing a major international platform to showcase the strength, diversity and growing capabilities of India's textile and apparel sector. AEPC actively participated in the event, facilitating meaningful engagement between Indian exporters, international buyers and other stakeholders. The event further reinforced our collective efforts towards promoting Brand India as a trusted, competitive and sustainable sourcing destination.

BRAND INDIA – FROM FIBRE TO FASHION

Friends, India's strength lies not only in its manufacturing capacity but in the complete value proposition that we can offer to the world. We have the capability to move from Fibre to Fashion, supported by a strong entrepreneurial base, skilled workforce, rich textile heritage and a diverse manufacturing ecosystem.

The broader **5F vision—Farm to Fibre to Factory to Fashion to Foreign—**captures the potential of India's integrated textile and apparel value chain. Our task now is to convert these inherent strengths into greater global market share. We need to build a stronger and more recognisable Brand India. International buyers today are looking beyond price. They are looking for reliability, quality, sustainability, compliance, innovation, traceability, speed and flexibility, and long-term partnerships.



India has the capability to offer all these strengths. Our collective objective should therefore be to position India not merely as a manufacturing or sourcing destination, but as a preferred and trusted global partner.

PRODUCT DIVERSIFICATION – THE MMF OPPORTUNITY

India must also accelerate its efforts towards product diversification, particularly in Man-Made Fibre-based apparel and other high-growth product segments. Global consumption patterns are changing. MMF-based products and specialised apparel categories offer significant opportunities for growth.

India has traditionally been strong in cotton-based apparel. While we must continue to strengthen this core strength, we also need to expand into newer product categories and respond to changing global demand.

Greater focus on MMF, value-added products, technical and specialised apparel, workwear, uniforms and other emerging product categories will be essential for increasing India's share in global apparel trade.

We must identify gaps created by changing global sourcing patterns and ensure that Indian manufacturers are prepared to respond quickly and effectively.

TECHNOLOGY, SUSTAINABILITY AND COMPETITIVENESS

The apparel industry is undergoing a rapid transformation driven by technology, innovation and changing global sourcing requirements. Artificial Intelligence, automation, digitalisation, sustainability and traceability are increasingly becoming integral to competitiveness.

To remain globally competitive, our industry must continuously invest in technology, innovation, productivity, quality, sustainability and skill development. Compliance alone will not be sufficient; we must move towards more sustainable, responsible and value-added business models.

AEPC will continue to support exporters, particularly MSMEs, through awareness programmes, knowledge-sharing and capacity-building initiatives.

THE ROAD AHEAD

Friends, despite the evolving global environment and increasing competition, I remain optimistic about the future of the Indian apparel industry. India is well positioned to benefit from changing global sourcing patterns, supported by its strong manufacturing base, skilled workforce and entrepreneurial strength.



Going forward, our focus must be on market and product diversification, effective utilisation of FTAs, technology and sustainability, higher productivity and quality, improved ease of doing business, and building a stronger Brand India. With preparation, competitiveness and collective action, I am confident that India can emerge as an even stronger and more reliable partner in the global apparel market.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I place on record my sincere gratitude to the Hon'ble Vice President of India, Shri C. P. Radhakrishnan, for his continued encouragement and support towards the growth and development of India's textile and apparel sector.

I express my sincere gratitude to Hon'ble Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi, Hon'ble Minister of Textiles Shri Giriraj Singh, Hon'ble Minister of Commerce & Industry Shri Piyush Goyal, Hon'ble Minister of Finance Smt. Nirmala Sitharaman, Hon'ble Ministers of State Shri Pabitra Margherita and Shri Jitin Prasada, RBI Governor Shri Sanjay Malhotra, Principal Secretary to the Prime Minister of India, Shri Shaktikanta Das, for their continued guidance, support and for giving due consideration to the concerns and requirements of the Indian apparel export industry.

I also extend my sincere thanks to Smt. Neelam Shami Rao, Secretary, Ministry of Textiles; Smt. Arti Kanwar, Additional Secretary, Ministry of Textiles; Shri A. Bipin Menon, Trade Advisor, Ministry of Textiles; Smt. Shubhra, Principal Consultant, Ministry of Textiles; Smt. Vrunda Manohar Desai, Textile Commissioner; Smt. Padmini Singla, Joint Secretary, Ministry of Textiles; Smt. Manisha Chatterjee, Joint Secretary; Smt. Alaknanda Dayal, Joint Secretary; Shri Mrutyunjay Behera, Economic Advisor; and other senior officials of the Government of India for their continuous support towards the growth and promotion of India's apparel exports.

My sincere thanks to Shri Rajesh Agarwal, Secretary, Department of Commerce, Ministry of Commerce & Industry; Shri Lav Agarwal, Director General of Foreign Trade; and Ms. Kapil Chaudhary, Joint Secretary, Ministry of Commerce & Industry, for their valuable guidance, support and cooperation in addressing the concerns of the apparel export industry.

I also wish to thank the all-other officials of DGFT, Department of Commerce, Ministry of Textiles, NITI Aayog, CBIC, Department of Financial Services, Textiles Committee, DRI/DGARM, and other Government bodies for their cooperation and facilitation of our industry.

I also extend my sincere thanks to Shri Virender Uppal, Executive Committee Member, for his valuable guidance and insightful suggestions, in dealing with matters concerning apparel export industry.



My sincere thanks to Shri Rajendra Goenka, Vice Chairman, AEPC, the Chairmen and members of the various Sub-Committees, namely Shri Sudhir Sekhri, Chairman, Advisory Sub-Committee; Shri K. M. Subramanian, Chairman, Export Promotion Committee; Shri H. K. L. Magu, Chairman, Finance & Budget Sub-Committee; Shri Lalit Thukral, In-charge, Regional Committee (Northern Region); Shri Narendra Goenka, In-charge, Regional Committee (Western Region); Shri Anil Buchasia, In-charge, Regional Committee (Eastern Region); Shri R. Ramu, In-charge, Regional Committee (Southern Region) and Shri Gaurav Uppal, Chairman, Committee for Road Map to Achieve Apparel Exports of USD 40 Billion by 2030.

I also place on record my sincere appreciation to the esteemed industry associations—GEMA, TEA, GEAR and CMAI—for their steadfast support, valuable cooperation and continued partnership in strengthening the Indian apparel industry.

I extend my gratitude to the press and media for consistently highlighting the concerns of the industry and giving wide coverage to AEPC's initiatives and recommendations from time to time.

My special appreciation goes to Shri Mithileshwar Thakur, Secretary General, AEPC, Smt. Jyoti Kaur, Additional Secretary General, Senior Director, Directors/General Managers, Additional Directors/Deputy General Managers, and the entire AEPC team and Regional Offices for their dedicated service, commitment and hard work. I also appreciate the Company Secretary in making the arrangements for the smooth conduct of this AGM

As we move forward, let us draw strength from our collective resolve and confidence in the future of Indian apparel exports. With the continued support of the Government and the commitment of our exporters and stakeholders, I am confident that India will emerge as a preferred global apparel sourcing destination and contribute to the vision of “Viksit Bharat.”

I once again thank all the members and stakeholders for their continued support, confidence and cooperation.

Thank you very much.

Jai Hind!

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