

Kanpur to Coimbatore, how textiles ministry took up PPE kits challenge

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New Delhi: In the last week of March 2020 as India was gearing up for its first lockdown amid Covid-19 spread, an empowered Group 3 was rushed by the Centre to facilitate availability of medical supplies: N-95 masks, testing swabs and PPE kits.

A new study has now disclosed that a key step in ensuring these supplies was to indigenise the manufacturing and setting up of eight pan-India testing labs. This includes South India Textile Research Association (SITRA), Coimbatore, Ordnance Factory, Kanpur, Small Arms Factory, Kanpur, Heavy Vehicles Factory Chennai, Institute of Nuclear Medicine and Allied Sciences (INMAS), Metal and Steel Factory (MSF) and Ordnance Factory in Ambarnath, Maharashtra. The study by Harvard business school affiliate Institute for Strategy and Competitiveness has disclosed that the ministry of textile (MoT) was appointed in February 2020 to lead this initiative to make India the

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manufacturer within 60 days from the launch of indigenisation programme.

Here's how it was done. Firstly, the technical committee was formed by MoT in February comprising officers from textile commissioner's office, medical emergency response team and office of drugs controllers. Secondly, the team compiled a list of high-quality textile manufacturing companies on the basis of inputs from industry associations and collected samples of textiles to be sent to SITRA. Thirdly the test results were reviewed by a technical experts' committee (TEC) for specifications on PPE cover-

as part of indigenisation journey. Fourthly, to ensure that technical specifications undergo and pass 'synthetic blood penetration test' and fifthly Hindustan Lifecare Limited (HLL) to monitor applicants.

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The study lauds MoT saying it facilitated prompt coordination with ministry of shipping for imported machineries, priority collection, dispatch of raw material, air flight logistic carriers as importing anything from abroad or transporting anything to anywhere was virtually impossible during March-May 2020.

"The MoT set up a Group-IV task force to align with the PPE manufacturers and streamline the international leg of the supply chain. The key activities of this task force involved the following. The first activity involved coordinating with the Indian missions abroad in

manufacturers were dependent regarding availability of raw material or machineries," the study says. A group of 150 officers from Centre were deputed across production units in India from Uttar Pradesh, Punjab, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka and West Bengal among key states. "All these officers were empowered under the Essential Commodities Act, 1955," the study says. The PPE manufacturers were divided into geographic clusters. This included Noida in UP, Ludhiana and Phagwara in Punjab, Ahmedabad and Vadodara in Gujarat, Tiruppur and Coimbatore in Tamil Nadu and Bhiwandi in Maharashtra among other areas. "We are much competitive vis-a-vis China as we have the capability to make PPE kits at one-third of the cost. These PPE kits can be produced at a cost between Rs 200 and Rs 600. Tiruppur's PPE manufacturers became proficient in delivering the high-quality and low-cost PPEs as compared to the imports from China," the study quotes Raja M Shamuugam, president, Tiruppur Exporters