

# Climate, yield drop turn India into net cotton importer

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**NEW DELHI:** India has turned into a net importer of cotton from being the world's second-largest overseas seller, a decline analysts attribute to waning productivity, the climate crisis and higher demand, all of which have made clothing and non-apparel fabric pricier.

The government has announced new steps to boost

output to reverse stalling exports, as the country's cotton import bill rocketed 200% in 2022-23 despite India being the world's largest producer. Higher costs weigh on the country's textile sector, a large employer.

In this financial year, exports slumped to \$512.04 million in the April-December period from \$1.97 billion in same period in the previous year. Imports rose from \$414.59 mil-

lion to \$1.32 billion in the corresponding period.

The Cotton Association of India has cut India's expected output in 2022-23 to 33 million bales of 170 kg each, which is 925,000 bales less from its initial projections. Production has been sliding. Output fell to a decade's low of 30.7 million bales of cotton in 2021-22.

Hotter temperatures, patchier rains, pests and drought linked to climate change

threaten much of the cotton produced in India, researchers have warned. Growing seasons have shortened in states such as Maharashtra, dwindling yields, according to a June 2022 report by Cotton 2040, an outfit advocating a climate-resilient fibre industry.

The government had waived customs duty on import of cotton between April and September to ease prices for factories and consumers. "A few product

categories such as textile, apparel and leather have been showing tepid growth as export demand for these products have been mellowing," the annual Economic Survey 2023 said in February.

In February, clothing major Raymonds reported 5.4% fall in third-quarter profits, while those for Arvind Ltd fell by 9%. "One of the key reasons for the crisis is stalling productivity as the gains from the current cot-

ton crop technology has waned. Farmers are suffering," said Anil Ghanawat of the Shetkari Sangathana, a farmers' collective.

The government hasn't approved any new genetically modified (GM) technology since permitting first-generation GM cotton in 2002. The current GM technology has runs its course, experts say, and is less effective against bollworms that drill into the crop's fibre balls.