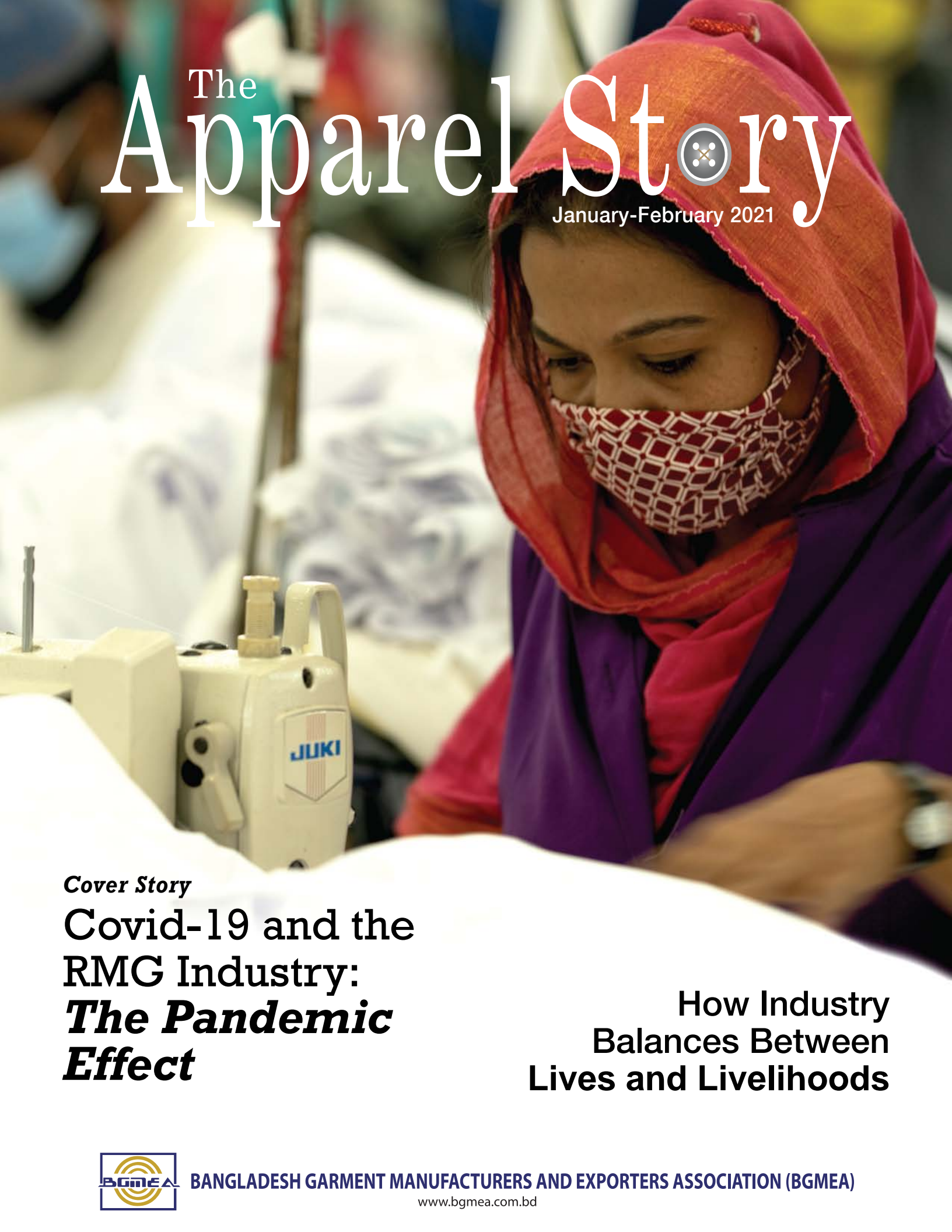


The Apparel Story

January-February 2021



Cover Story

Covid-19 and the RMG Industry: ***The Pandemic Effect***

How Industry
Balances Between
Lives and Livelihoods



BANGLADESH GARMENT MANUFACTURERS AND EXPORTERS ASSOCIATION (BGMEA)

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MESSAGE FROM **BGMEA PRESIDENT**

The story of the entire apparel industry during the pandemic will always be marked as a unique chapter in all our lives.

The struggle, the uncertainty, the opportunities, and the disappointments are all part of our COVID saga. The pandemic has injected a renewed sense of resilience in all of us. Instead of a sense of loss, we have all gained faith in ways more than one.

The industry with a 17% less growth, with a 5% price decline in less than 6 months and with 40% less capacity utilisation in woven wear, it's only rational for us to restructure our basic ways of doing business and looking forward to a new direction in business.

With the latest Technology Upgradation Fund announced by the Bangladesh Bank, we can and must restructure our products and production processes. The undeniably strong support from the government has kept us afloat.

We can now only hope that the west turns around now. With vaccinations being gradually available, we can only hope for the markets to turn around, not only with selected products but in an overall manner across all categories

Let's keep all our fingers crossed and hope for the best of what lies ahead of us.

May Allah bless us all.

Rubana Huq
President, BGMEA



*N*ever in our wildest dreams had we thought that a microbe could wreak such a havoc on human lives around the world. The Covid-19 pandemic created an earthquake like catastrophe that shook nearly every industry to its core, both socially and economically. The global fashion industry was hit hard and fast by the Covid which is unprecedented in nature and mammoth in terms of devastation. The pandemic has also laid bare vulnerabilities of the supply chains in the global fashion industry where manufacturers and millions of garment workers have shouldered the greatest cost due to the pandemic. Store closings, supply chain disruptions and rampant order cancellation led to sudden closure of garment factories in Bangladesh pushing lives of millions of garment workers into uncertainty. The harsh reality revealed by the pandemic proliferates the need for industry-wide systemic change to build a more resilient and sustainable apparel industry. The Covid-led crisis has clearly shown why it's really important to ensure payment guarantee in the form of credit insurance scheme and proper contractual protocol between buyers and suppliers.

In Bangladesh, the Covid-19 pandemic created an unprecedented crisis having devastating impacts on the RMG sector and its 4.1 million workers. However, the industry has fought back with on time crucial support from government. We would like to extend profound gratitude towards the Honorable Prime Minister of Bangladesh for showing generosity by lending a number of crucial policy supports including the stimulus package that helped the sector in its struggle in turning around. We are also fortunate that we had the visionary leadership of Dr. Rubana Huq in BGMEA in this time of crisis.

One day the world will bounce back from the crisis, but we must remember the lessons left behind by the pandemic.

Wish all a very happy 2021!

Regards
Khan Monirul Alam (Shuvo)
Editor
The Apparel Story

Disclaimer: The Apparel Story is published for private circulation by Bangladesh Gament Manufacturers & Exporters Association (BGMEA). BGMEA assumes no responsibility for the correctness of items quoted in the magazine although every effort is made to give information from sources believed to be reliable.

The Apparel Story

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Covid-19 and the RMG Industry: ***The Pandemic Effect***

By Fahmida Haq Majumder

Since the breakout in last December, Covid-19 has inflicted total mayhem worldwide, affecting global economy in terms of production, devastated supply chain, suspended manufacturing and export-import activities. As an industry that pays nearly USD 5 billion in wages to its workers, wages that circulates in the economy 2.5 times (in addition to other transactions done by the industry), the Ready Made Garment (RMG) industry of Bangladesh has faced an insurmountable consequences due to Covid-19.

Soon after the virus breakout in March 2020, according to a conservative data, 1150 factories reported export cancellation/suspension from international buyers and retailers worth of USD 3.18 billion. Rampant order cancellation from the buyers resulted in factories facing unmanageable financial disaster caused by bank liabilities and unmet expenses of overheads, wage payment difficulties and, in the worst cases, bankruptcy and permanent closure. Amid the crisis moment; “partnership”, “professionalism” and “cooperation” that we use in our day-to-day cycles witnessed the sad reality of capitalizing on the unprecedented situation.

However, brands had been continuously consulted by BGMEA, with industry experts, respective governments and the concerned parties onboard, to get over the massive order losses. Since the cancellation of USD 3 billion, we have come a long way to resolve the cancellation with brands. As of now, most of the cancelled or held orders have been reinstated by the respective brands. As a whole, out of the USD 3 billion in cancelled orders, 85-90% has been reinstated. However, many of them have imposed discounts up to 20%-50%.

The declining trend of apparel price is a long drawn trend in global trade. Even before Covid, prices were declining, whereas the cost of production was going up every year. Critically, factories have to spend more in safety and sustainability than ever before. Furthermore compliance to health protocols after Covid-19 has added to increasing costs. During

January-September the unit price of apparel exported by Bangladesh has declined by 2.17% (year on year) as per the National Board of Revenue, Bangladesh. As per the data of OTEXA, during January-September 2020, US's apparel import price from Bangladesh declined by 3.18% year on year; whereas EU's apparel import price declined by 1.13% for the same time period, according to Eurostat. Nevertheless, there is no alternative to win this battle without ensuring the workers safety first, no matter how much toll it takes.

The Covid-19 pandemic has been a significant wake up call for us emphasizing that a resilient healthcare system requires more attention than ever before to protect economies and livelihoods. This came to our realization immediately after the pandemic hit our country, we were more concerned to protect our workers from the infection, than the business. Accordingly we sent our workers to home for a month with paid leave, and then took a cautious step to re-open following a strict healthcare guideline prepared through in consultation with the Ministry of Health of the Bangladesh Government, ILO, WHO and combining with proper homegrown solutions keeping in mind both necessity and practicality of the recommended measures. A state-of-the-art PCR laboratory to test garment workers for coronavirus has been established and launched by BGMEA. BGMEA also partnered with Inspectorio to help member factories mitigate Covid resurgence. BGMEA and Maya, a digital worker wellness service provider, have signed an

agreement to provide free services to help prevent and limit the spread of Covid-19, while also addressing general medical and mental health related issues amongst RMG workers.

When the whole world is collapsing from the attack of deadly Coronavirus, there were unprecedented move by all the ministries and department of the government to stand by the industry and helping us survive. Policies like stay on loan classification rules and regulations related to export precede realization, making the use of EDF simpler were time befitting and lifesaving. The Honorable Prime Minister of Bangladesh announced a stimulus package worth of BDT 50 billion to the export-oriented industries, including the RMG sector, which provided much needed relief for the devastated exporters and businessmen. Thanks to that salary support, factory owners have been able to pay off their workers even though production was halted for 40 consecutive days during March and April 2020. Without the support and assistance we acquired from the govt. during the pandemic, we might not be able to pull out of the dire situation like we did.





The aftermath of the pandemic may lead to another wave of disruption in the fashion industry in terms of consumers' behavior and spending. The situation is evidently demonstrating that in the upcoming world, online retail will be booming and life will move towards a "digital transformation". We are planning to launch a virtual market place much like Amazon/eBay, which will be a safe and competent platform for both buyers and sellers. With Covid-19 introducing the new normal around the globe, investments in PPEs and other safety items may be time befitting.

The 4.1 million garment workers are the fuel of our industry that has been oiling the production wheel and have played the key role in bringing the whole sector back on track. We need to continue the momentum of health safety and hygiene practices and the awareness of social distancing among the workers in order to be prepared for any chance of a second or third spike. Proper health and hygiene facilities for the workers have to be ensured at workplaces and the places where they reside and commute.

In the post-Covid era, focusing on workers skills development and 'industrial attachment' is very crucial. With 4th IR taking precedence, there is no alternative but to enhance our efficiency and competitiveness. Ensuring female participation in the higher and mid-level (as CAD operator, supervisor, and Virtual Prototyping machine operator) is one of the most important agenda of ours. From BGMEA, in order to enhance competitiveness of the RMG industry of Bangladesh, we are going to set up "Centre of

innovation, efficiency & OSH" which will function in such a way that it will serve facility management as well as employee skill and/or efficiency improvement.

Resilience of our people to any shock is something that should be admired. At the moment we can say that the industry has been able to overcome the dangerous period from March and April, however, we cannot outweigh the probability of a second or third wave in the forthcoming months. In order to cope in a post-Covid market, solving issues regarding access to working capital and access to credit, Credit guarantee scheme, a proper exit policy, building up the enabling environment for attracting FDI is some of the most vital things that will help the industry get back on its feet.

We have always been on the side of our workers and of all others who have shown genuine interest to work for the betterment of the workers. This is perhaps the most crucial time demanding highest solidarity and unity. If all of us join hands together and coordinate to sustain the business, then assurance of wages and workers welfare is bound to follow.



Digital Payment to Usher in New Era in Bangladesh Garment Industry

By Maria Rafique

Bangladesh garment industry has witnessed a massive shift from analogue to digital in terms of wage payment, a move that opens a new window for positively impacting the lives of millions of garment workers through financial inclusion into the formal banking system. In April 2020 when the Covid pandemic led the country to a complete halt, 2.5 million accounts were opened through mobile financial services in just 25 days to pay garment workers digitally.

The initiative of bringing the garment worker under the digital payment platform was envisioned by the Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA). Way back in June 2019, in line with the government's vision of a digital Bangladesh, BGMEA was the only association that piloted digital salary disbursement in the factories to ensure female workers get full ownership of their earnings and increased transparency in payment. Wage digitalisation will make garment workers more capable and independent in using their money.

Later, ICT Division of Bangladesh government and Bangladesh Bank signed an agreement to implement an "Interoperable Digital Transaction Platform (IDTP)". It will promote financial inclusion and reduce time and costs associated with payment processing. In alignment with the government initiative, BGMEA is committed to implementing wage digitisation for the garment industry through the IDTP platform to make a difference to the lives of millions of garment workers in Bangladesh.

Financial inclusion not only enables even the most vulnerable with the opportunity to get out of a vicious circle of poverty but also facilitates to foster countrywide economic growth. It reduces widespread inequality, bringing an environment for financial justice and enhancing societal participation in favor of women empowerment. In order to achieve financial inclusion in an affordable manner, there is no better alternative than digitalization of financial services.

Digital payment initiative offers financial security, easier transactions, position independent financial services, and financial record-keeping of transactions, report generation, and monitoring of KPIs (as required).

The most important part of a digitized wage payment system is that it has successfully brought a huge chunk of financially isolated people of Bangladesh into the institutional banking system of the formal economy. It ultimately enables the textile workers to receive their salaries and other payments through a personal bank account, mobile money or payment card solution, instead of outmoded cash-based systems.

Digital payment can reduce the risk of carrying cash, extra management costs and time required to disburse wages manually, while ensuring greater transparency. Workers can save and enjoy facilities of credit on certain conditions while introducing the unbanked people into the financial system. By paying wages digitally 20% loss

of production hours on the day of payment can be reduced.

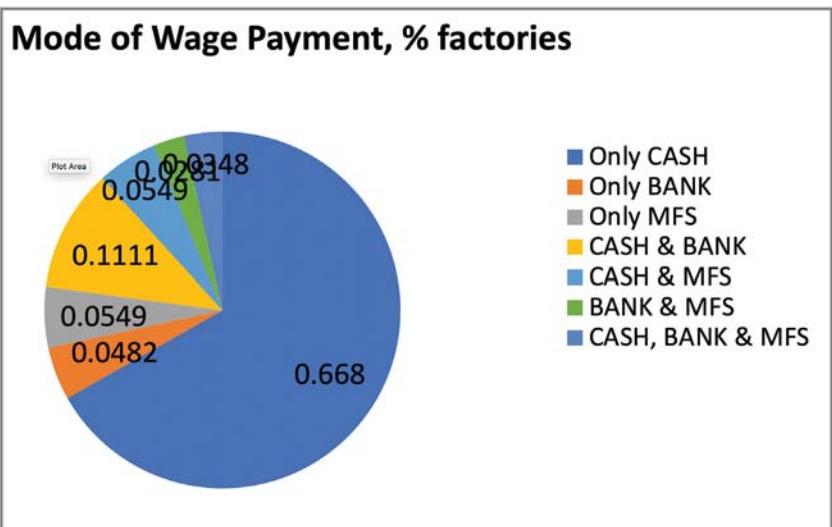
Urgency During COVID-19 pandemic

The Covid-19 pandemic has affected almost the world economy causing huge losses in export-import oriented markets. Bangladesh, having an export-oriented economy, is facing severe consequences and Covid has left the workers the most vulnerable. With most of the factories remaining closed and export orders worth more than USD 3 billion cancelled, the industry has been facing an enormous crisis. Sustaining the factories and paying worker wages had become one of the most difficult tasks. BGMEA pleaded to the government for support to pay wages and salaries since exports were halted and payments were delayed.

Following the severity of the situation, the Honorable Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina had granted Covid assistance in the form of special incentive worth BDT 50 Billion. Accordingly, the Bangladesh Bank had issued a circular to the scheduled banks

clarifying the modalities of disbursement of this assistance and how to apply for this incentive, and how wages/salaries would be paid to the ultimate beneficiaries. As the circular required to disburse the wage/salary through mobile financial services (MFS), BGMEA conducted a survey to understand the extent to which RMG workers were covered by MFS and the share of wage payment through MFS in April, 2020.

From the responses of 752 factories, employing 1,100,342 workers, it was observed that payment of wages and salaries to workers and employees respectively were done mostly through cash. 67% factories provided wage through cash, followed by MFS at 5%, and bank transfer at 5%. 23% factories followed multiple modes of wage payment.



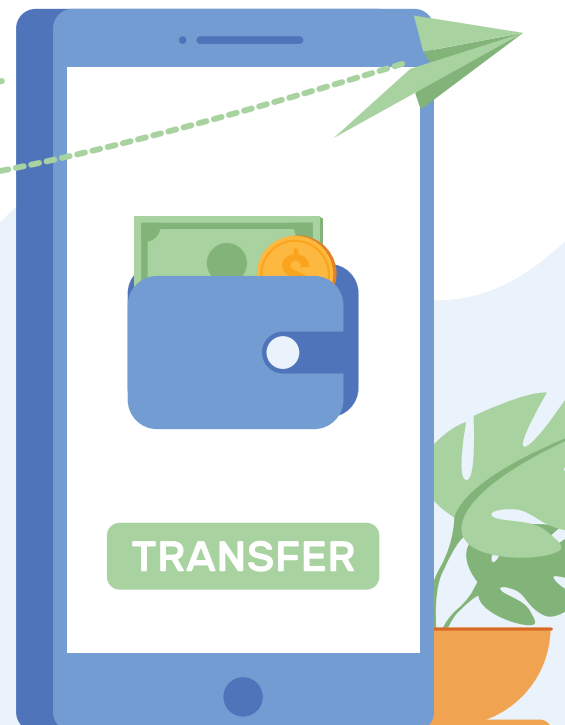
Only 43% of the 1,100,342 workers and employees had MFS accounts, i.e. bKash, Rocket, etc. However, the standard deviation was 35% implying that the use of MFS accounts was very minimal among the workers in certain factories, whereas it was 100% for a few others. About 41%, or 448,616, of the total number of workers and employees surveyed used smartphones. This implied that despite 41% of workers and employees possessing a smart device compatible for easy operation of MFS, only 43% of those had MFS accounts, and only 5% factories paid wages to workers through MFS. These numbers were insignificant.

Post-Covid Situation: A Massive growth in Digital Wage Payment System

While discussing the digital payment initiative for garments workers' wages, there have been several barriers; such as: a) lack of literacy, b) lack of required documents (such as registered or updated national identification card as known as NID to open accounts), c) lack of a proper banking ecosystem, and so on. For such reasons, the initiative had largely been ignored and continued to stay within the planning phase. However, in case of the Covid-19 outbreak, even though it had adversely affected the lives of millions of RMG workers, resulting negative growth in exports, it had fortunately brought the solution to the digital payment at last. Amid the pandemic, with the help of government directive and promotional activities taken by the local MFS providers, about three million apparel workers opened accounts through MFS providers.

To avail adequate transparency, the Bangladesh government and its regulatory authorities made it mandatory for stimulus receivers to disburse wages through digital payment gateways. In availing the funds from the package offered by Government, the factory owners compelled workers to open accounts with MFS providers. In accordance with that development, MFS providers had also taken promotional initiatives to reach out to the marginal economy. According to the Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA), 2.5 million workers opened accounts alone in April 2020. As mentioned earlier, there are still major barriers to ensure full functioning of digital financial services (DFS) in the RMG sector as well as in other industries. One of the prominent issues, financial and digital literacy for garment workers under the digital wage payment system is pressing harder. Without the digital literacy, workers would not be able to effectively use the mobile wallet or digital wallet. Industry stakeholders think digital payment will usher in a new era in the garment industry of Bangladesh.

In this regard, workers will be trained on how to open and use accounts through mobile apps and on its use. Once incorporated, workers will be able to transfer their wages to their other accounts or cash out through bKash, Rocket and/or Nagad. All the mobile financial service providers should also come forward to join the 'E-Wallet for RMG Workers' platform to improve the efficacy of the initiative.



HOW INDUSTRY BALANCES BETWEEN LIVES AND LIVELIHOODS

By Nasim Uddin

Covid-19 created a cruel dilemma for the apparel industry of Bangladesh — lives or livelihoods? With the onset of the pandemic spreading all over the world, keeping people inside their dwellings appeared imperative to contain the spread. While lockdown across the globe was considered as the foremost approach to prevent the spread of Covid, the strategy had a serious side effect on human livelihoods and a massive toll on the economy since it brought everyday life and economic activities to a complete halt. The Covid situation compelled the government to impose a nationwide lockdown leading to temporary closure of manufacturing facilities, including garment factories.

The economy of Bangladesh heavily relies on the apparel industry which accounts for around 83 percent of the country's total export earnings. On the other hand, the sector is a source of employment for about 4.1 million people. Each worker provides for an average of three family members, bringing the total number of people relying on the sector for their livelihoods to 16.4 million. Given the influence and importance of the RMG sector on people and the economy, reopening garment factories became an imperative, but of

course necessitated taking adequate preparations to avoid further outbreaks.

The Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA), which represents the garment industry of Bangladesh, took a number of initiatives to allow factories to resume their operations in the safest possible way. After six months of reopening factories, the rate of infection in the apparel sector has been found to be insignificant. A recent survey found that 99.8 percent of garment workers were untouched by Covid-19. Of the surveyed workers, 95.8 percent said they weren't aware of co-workers being infected or not. The survey titled "Covid-19 Impact on Selected RMG factories and Way Forward" was conducted by the Manusher Jonno Foundation.

Guidelines for Factory Opening

BGMEA, in consultation with the Ministry of Health of the Bangladesh Government, the International Labour Organization (ILO), the World Health Organization (WHO), developed a health guideline/protocol for member factories, combining it with proper homegrown solutions keeping in mind both necessity and practicality of recommended measures. All the

factories under BGMEA have been advised to strictly follow the recommended health protocols.

Scan to view the safety guidelines.



Monitoring Compliance to Health Protocols

In addition to the development of protocol it was equally important to ensure that the safety guidelines were properly followed. BGMEA made random unannounced audits of factories to keep an eye on whether the protocols are being followed properly. The field-level monitors would then submit their audit reports to the BGMEA safety monitoring committee. If any factory was found falling short of compliance, it was immediately notified and asked to improve the compliance level as stated in the safety protocol. Compliance monitoring is still being carried out by the association in order to ensure that factories operate safely and follow the workplace safety guidelines.



Covid Test Lab for Garment Workers

Detecting infected persons and isolating them from others is a recommended step to contain the spread of Covid. BGMEA has set up a PCR laboratory to test garment workers for coronavirus. The lab, equipped with state-of-the-art testing facility, can test up to 180 samples per shift. The number of shifts and machines can be increased if required.

Partnering with Inspectorio

BGMEA partnered with Inspectorio to help factories assess their adherence to Covid-19 Guidelines and is managed via a free digital platform 'Rise'. Today Rise is being used by thousands of organizations to manage environmental, social and technical facility-level audits. The platform is designed with Covid-19-specific tools that allow companies to view real-time coronavirus statistics as well as updates on facility compliance and assessment case information. The garment factories got free access to use Inspectorio Rise and implement Covid-19 Assessment. This has also helped support the preparedness of the factories to

get back to work efficiently and safely. In addition, the platform helped the manufacturing facilities identify areas of improvement, and apply solutions based on industry best practices and recommendations.

BGMEA and Maya Joint Initiative

BGMEA and Maya, a digital worker wellness service, signed an agreement to provide free services to help prevent and limit the spread of Covid-19, while also addressing general medical and mental health related issues amongst ready-made garment (RMG) workers. Factory workers can directly call Maya doctors and counsellors free of cost through a dedicated hotline established only for RMG workers. They can also ask questions about physical and mental health concerns and get answers from certified doctors and mental health specialists.

Free Telemedicine Consultations for Garment Workers

BGMEA and Common Health signed a collaborative agreement to provide free telemedicine doctor consultations for garment workers. Common Health has provided garment workers with a

free phone-based consultation with an MBBS doctors, covering queries relating to primary health care, mental health, and Covid-19. All doctors are licensed by the Bangladesh Medical and Dental Council and adheres to clinical protocols based on World Health Organization and Government of Bangladesh standards. Workers were screened for suspected Covid-19 cases during consultation as part of efforts to prevent and control the spread of Covid-19 and other infectious diseases.

Awareness Raising Infographics

BGMEA made infographic videos on Covid-19 and ran them on social media to raise awareness among garment workers. Scan to view the infographics



To keep the wheel of economy running and supporting the lives of millions, the industry needs to keep running production while maintaining the safety momentum until the pandemic is over, thus striking a balance between lives and livelihoods.



DECATHLON

“In Bangladesh, we have seen a lot of improvements in the workplace, compliance building, as well as in structural standards & sustainability”

Deepak DSOUZA, Country Manager, Decathlon Bangladesh in an exclusive interview with the Apparel Story shares the story of Decathlon, its uniqueness as a brand, long-term business plan and how it's working in the area of sustainability. He also sheds light on how Bangladesh can increase its share in global sportswear market.

What makes Decathlon different from other brands?

Purpose of Decathlon is to take the pleasure and benefits of sports and make it accessible to people, while being useful to people and protecting the planet.

At Decathlon we have various jobs and responsibilities that are totally aligned to this purpose. We work to create a good balance between “Local for Local” (subsidiarity) approach and what could be best for global interests. We are present in more than 60 countries and each country takes decisions in the best interest of their local communities and customers.

We have also had this wonderful opportunity to have our presence in Bangladesh for production sourcing and to test the retail environment for Bangladeshi users and customers.

Decathlon has been sourcing apparel from Bangladesh for more than 20 years. It has also opened its retail showroom in Bangladesh. What do you like about Bangladesh as a sourcing destination?

Bangladesh has been a strategic country for our sourcing as we have diverse kind of products from basic T-shirts, woven & synthetic textiles, shoes, tents, and sleeping bags.

We appreciate our suppliers' willingness to work and implement different strategies linked with operational excellence, continuous improvement transformation, transparency in manufacturing, sustainable development, quality of products, and the service mindset to offer solutions and long term strategies to build partnerships.

We work with almost 65 suppliers that employ close to 110,000 workforce in their factories.

In 2019, we opened a LAB store in Uttara and have included an E-commerce portal to deliver our products to other cities through our own channel and other platforms.

We are also hopeful to sell our textiles local-to-local if we could get the necessary permissions and regulatory approvals from NBR (National Board of Revenue).

What is the long-term business plan of Decathlon in Bangladesh?

Lot of things are uncertain, especially those linked to fast changing customer needs and demands. Hence one of our mid-to long-term goals is to continue to maintain agility, flexibility & faster time on developments, reducing time to market on development of textiles and shoes from 6 months to just a few weeks.

It will also be interesting to see how we can access and deliver to other growing retail markets in Asia with better lead times.

We believe that the result of good performances and partnerships, coupled with local autonomy, will eventually help us grow the business in the coming years.

How can Bangladesh increase its share in global sportswear market?

Some of the reasons are already explained above. For us one of the important indicators will be TECO (Total Environmental Cost of Ownership), which means industrial price produced in the best sustainable way and delivered with the best service and lead-times.

We would also like to see more local synthetic raw materials and components, specially on technical fabrics such as elastane, nylon, polyamide and synthetic woven fabrics with

coating. We see that this could further enhance the local LT for quicker developments and growing demand.

Bangladesh RMG industry has gone through significant changes, especially in the area of workplace safety and environmental sustainability. As a brand how do you see it?

The seventeen Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are a call to action for all countries to promote prosperity while protecting the planet. At Decathlon, we want to contribute to a better world by taking actions to advance those of the SDGs that we are able to act on. In Bangladesh, we have seen a lot of improvements in the workplace, compliance building, as well as in structural standards and sustainability. Similarly a lot of progress has been made with worker well-being and other projects such as medical insurance, fair price shop, worker voice, workplace standards, and environmental sustainability.

We know Decathlon has a commitment to tackling climate. How is Decathlon supporting its suppliers in the area of environmental sustainability in Bangladesh, especially in reducing carbon footprint and using renewable energy?

The impact of the climate crisis is more visible than ever before. We need to protect our environment – our playground – for future generations. To build a better future for our planet, our communities, our workers and our economy, we commit to ambitious climate action.

One of our key priorities will be to reduce our CO2 footprint. As a corporate commitment we would like to have 100% RE (renewable energy) by 2026, including in our stores.



Decathlon Lab Store Uttara

We are committed to taking a path toward limiting global warming to +1.5°C. Our ambition is 40% reduction in our carbon emissions between 2016 and 2026.

100% of our electrical requirements in our stores and warehouses will come from renewable sources, by 2026.

100% of our partner suppliers will use electricity from renewable sources.

90% of our suppliers have set goals to reduce CO2 emissions by following the SBTi (Science base target) criteria.

100% of our cotton will come from more sustainable sources by the end of 2020

100% of our polyester will come from more sustainable sources by the end of 2022 (recycled, dope-dyed, etc.)

For production, as a first step we are benchmarking our current CO2 emissions linked to energy/machinery and other domestic consumption. The next steps will be to have a clear road

map to reduce CO2 emissions by following the SBTi (Science base target) criteria and working towards Green Energy/Renewable Energy with clear commitments and action plans.

We appreciate our suppliers willingness to work and implement CO2 reduction actions and we can proudly say that in Bangladesh 55% of local sourcing is made through green energy in 2020.

Is there any other area where Decathlon is supporting its suppliers in Bangladesh?

Decathlon also supports its suppliers on Industrial Transformation/Manufacturing & Operational excellence. We collaborate with our suppliers on industrial training, develop more local autonomy through coaching and workshops to skill up the continuous improvement culture. We work on a Project mode with clear priorities and actions.

Changes in fashion industry – be it in trends or technology – are faster than ever now. What areas Decathlon has been focusing on for future fashion?

We are more focused on functional sports wear, and, depending on user needs, feedback & sports market analytics, our R&D will be focused more on technical usage and better functional properties for sports wear users.

What areas should Bangladeshi manufacturers now focus on to enhance their competitiveness and increase their share in global apparel market?

Bangladeshi manufacturers could focus more towards value-addition products, and product Diversification (Swimwear/Technical Active wear, etc) and to move more towards Industrial Costing (OME- Overall Manufacturing Efficiency).

The future clearly depends on how quickly we can move towards operational excellence, digital transformation and creating a sustainable eco-system by reducing the CO2 footprint (use of renewable energy/green energy) that will make us attractive for the long term.



Decathlon Bangladesh Teammates



This crisis has emphasised the need to build stronger, better, safer and more resilient supply chains that we all hope can better respond to this type of shock in the future

Tuomo Poutiainen is the Country Director of ILO Bangladesh. In an exclusive interview with the Apparel Story, he expresses his opinion on the way the RMG industry of Bangladesh responded to the crisis created by the Covid pandemic and reopened factories in the safest possible way. He also shares what are the lessons of the pandemic and what changes are required to build a safer and more resilient supply chains.

Covid-19 created an unprecedented situation for the industry putting both lives and livelihood under serious threat. While lockdown was viewed extremely important to prevent the spread of the Covid and save lives from risk, shutdown of factories put livelihood of garment workers at stake.

What would you say about the way the RMG industry responded and acted to strike a balance between lives and livelihood by opening factories following safety protocol developed in consultation with the WHO, ILO and government's health department?

I think the speed, urgency and capability demonstrated by the RMG industry bodies has to be commended. It was essential for the sector to reopen but even more so under safe working conditions that did not endanger the lives – or livelihoods – of factory management or millions of workers.

The ILO and partners (DIFE, MoLE) moved quickly to get Covid-19 workplace guidelines drafted, approved and disseminated to help minimize the spread of the virus in workplaces. Measures like installing hand washing and sanitizing facilities outside factories; ensuring that all staff wore masks and recommending that factories reconfigure their layouts to ensure social

distancing (where viable) were all critical in helping minimize the spread. Laying on medical support and testing facilities was also extremely important.

Better Work (BW) also released a Covid-19 Management Guidance document in April 2020 to help factories reduce the risk of coronavirus and take practical measures to maintain necessary Occupational Safety and Health (OSH) conditions. The BW team was also coordinating information campaigns and training for national partners, providing policy advice, and helping bring the Government, employers, workers, and international buyers together to develop joint responses.

BW's in-person factory services are temporarily on hold, but all the services are being delivered virtually. We launched the Virtual Compliance Check service in September 2020 to test a different approach of doing Assessment.

In August 2020 a "Rapid Assessment in times of Covid-19 of Workers and Workplaces in the RMG Sector survey," commissioned by ILO, found that most of the factories had applied the guidance given in these documents, including establishing coronavirus prevention task forces and providing PPE to the workforce.

With the factories now operating in full scale – albeit under challenging pricing conditions – we are all working now to help the industry 'build back better'. This is only possible with strong collaboration, partnerships and commitment from all sides.

It was feared that opening of factories would lead to mass infection and casualties among garment workers, and the industry was much criticized for opening factories amid Covid situation. But what we have seen now is a sharp contrast to the scenario that was widely speculated. What has made this possible, you think? How the precautionary and safety measures taken and followed by the industry contributed to that?

The International Labor Organization (ILO), in partnership with the Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters' Association (BGMEA) and the Bangladesh Knitwear Manufacturers and Exporters' Association (BKMEA), launched a comprehensive safety and

training package to help the RMG industry better protect and monitor workers and working conditions.

The package – known as the RMG 'Learning Hub' – focused on three core areas: a) raising Covid-19 prevention awareness among workers and factory management; b) ensuring Covid-19 Occupational Safety and Health (OSH) preparedness guidelines were being followed; and, c) promoting strong social dialogue in the workplace.

This was all made possible thanks to our development partners, namely Canada, Denmark, Netherlands, Sweden, the UK, and the EU

This is a one-year initiative (July 2020 – June 2021) and already the 'virtual' training has provided Training of Trainers on Covid-19 Awareness to 85 BGMEA and BKMEA-nominated 'master trainers' followed by 'OSH Guideline amid Covid-19' to a further 50 master trainers.

Once the current situation permits, the safety training sessions will be physically rolled out to BGMEA and BKMEA factories.

How do you think we should prepare ourselves for the projected second wave of COVID-19 ahead?

The ILO, like many other stakeholders, is trying to help the industry build back better after COVID-19. There is the health challenge and then a business/economic one. From the health perspective, with the OSH guideline and scores of training workshops already completed, the country and the RMG sector is in much

better 'pandemic preparedness' mode. We now have a much better understanding of how the pandemic works and how we can minimize its spread.

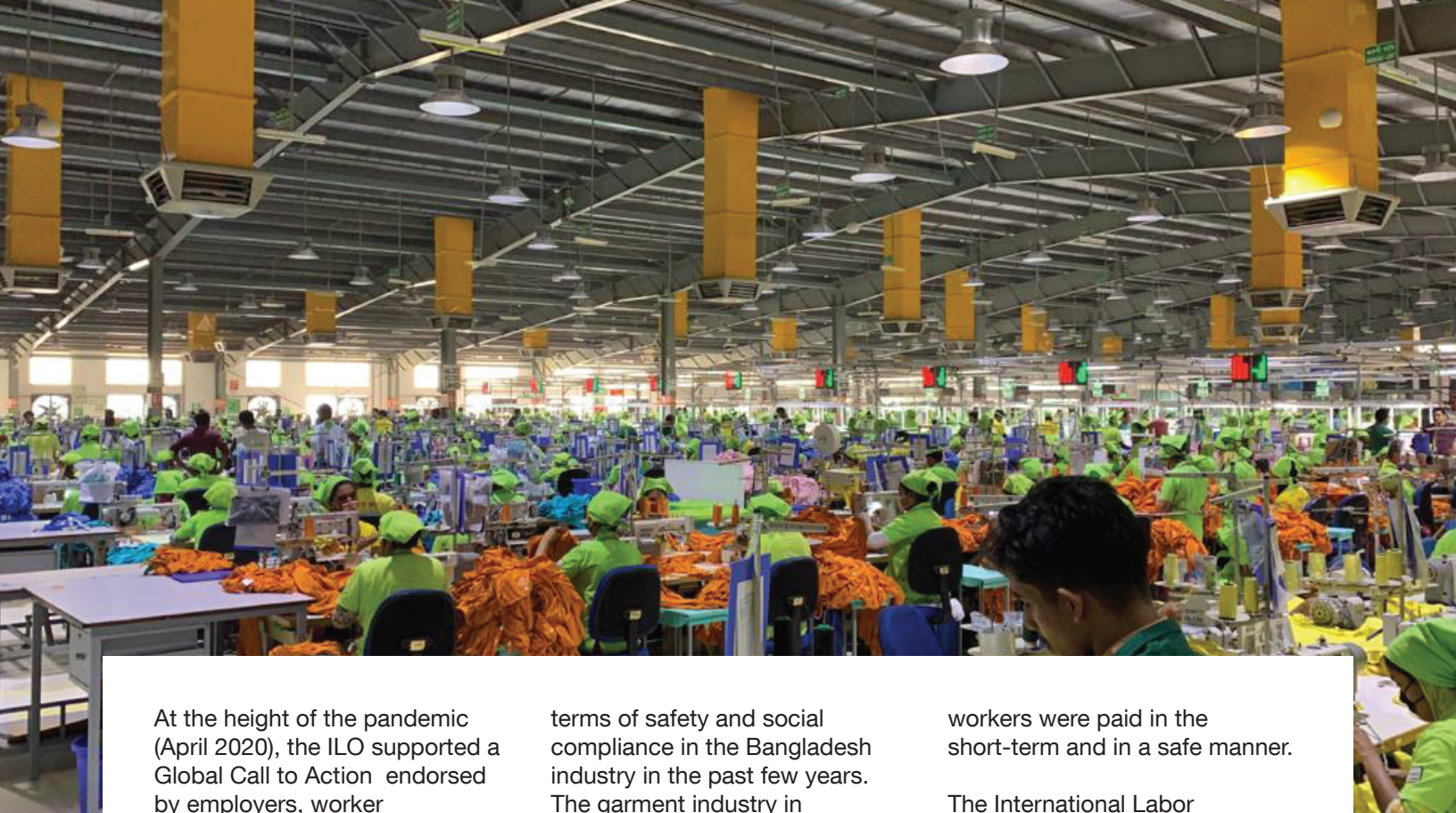
That said, the economic fallout of a second wave – challenges with the delay and cancellation of buyers' export orders, the risk of layoffs and fluctuating demands in the supply chain – will be much more difficult to contend with.

The ILO's supply chain experts in Bangkok have developed a number of Covid-19 Business Resilience Guides and have run virtual sessions for 167 factory representatives from Bangladesh

The Guides have been developed to assist factory managers to navigate the ongoing impact of the pandemic and provide concrete steps for factories to take. They also come with additional support materials, such as Excel sheets and templates for preparing action plans and adjusting factory layouts.

We must continue promoting the Sustainability Compact, which brings together the European Union (EU), the Government of Bangladesh, the United States, Canada and the ILO, and features Responsible Business Conduct as a key pillar.

The RMG industry, especially millions of workers have been badly impacted by the Covid situation following rampant cancellation of orders by brands and buyers. It is said that ensuring workers' interests is a responsibility shared both by suppliers and buyers. What is your opinion about it?



At the height of the pandemic (April 2020), the ILO supported a Global Call to Action endorsed by employers, worker organisations, brands and retailers to help manufacturers survive economic disruption caused by Covid-19 pandemic and to protect workers' income, health and employment. It also called for work on sustainable systems of social protection for a more just and resilient garment industry.

The lack of a social safety net literally brought the sector to its knees and mercifully, the government stepped in with USD 600 million stimulus package to protect workers' salaries.

Achieving an equal partnership between all stakeholders along the supply chain will entail a change in the relationships between buyers and suppliers. Better purchasing practices are needed. Stronger enforcement of government-backed due diligence in consuming countries might constitute a response.

At the same time, it is necessary to maintain the progress made in

terms of safety and social compliance in the Bangladesh industry in the past few years. The garment industry in Bangladesh must come together to agree on a collective code of conduct for manufacturers.

This crisis has emphasised the need to build stronger, better, safer and more resilient supply chains that we all hope can better respond to this type of shock in the future.

The entire industry – suppliers, buyers, workers' representatives - need to engage in social dialogue to find a way that minimizes financial harm and ensure a resilient supply chain.

Through digital payment of wages, financial inclusion is being ensured during Covid time and a huge workforce has been included in this process. What is your opinion regarding it?

Due to the pandemic, many lessons have been learned over the past few months and a Government mandate to pay digital wages played a critical role in ensuring that millions of

workers were paid in the short-term and in a safe manner.

The International Labor Organization (ILO) is a partner of the Better Than Cash Alliance to promote digital payments as an important tool to support decent work, financial inclusion and economic opportunities in the workplace.

In fact, the use of digital financial services have proven to be more efficient and more effective than cash and there is now little reason why the industry cannot move away from a cash-based system. Another very important point is the role digitization plays in advancing greater financial inclusion and security, particularly for vulnerable populations.

An estimated 55-60% of the RMG workforce are women and many still do not have access to formal financial services such as banking, savings, credit, or insurance. Going forward, digital and financial inclusion will be an important enabler of women's economic empowerment. That is just one powerful example of 'building back better'.

In the face of the new normal

Four changes apparel manufacturers must make

By Vivek Ramachandran

Apparel manufacturers must set their goals higher than just surviving the current crisis. They must fully embrace and exploit the opportunities that the situation presents and use this crisis to establish the foundations for growth in years to come.

The winners that emerge from times of turmoil tend to be companies that clear hurdles by a significant margin; countries and companies that make changes beyond the requirements of the day.

The evolution and demise of apparel manufacturing in the United States perfectly encapsulates both sides of this story.

The US apparel industry grew exponentially after the Industrial Revolution, with a net growth of 7.5M workers from 1880-1920 according to the NCBI. British ideas brought technology to the United States, but the real impetus for growth came from new, homegrown innovations. Eli Whitney, for example, sped up the separation of seeds from cotton, which enabled production of the latter to increase fifty-fold. Fast forward to 2011, US apparel manufacturing had dwindled over the course of two decades, losing about 750,000 jobs according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics. The common explanation is the move to low wage countries. This however, neglects the advantages of speed, flexibility, and proximity

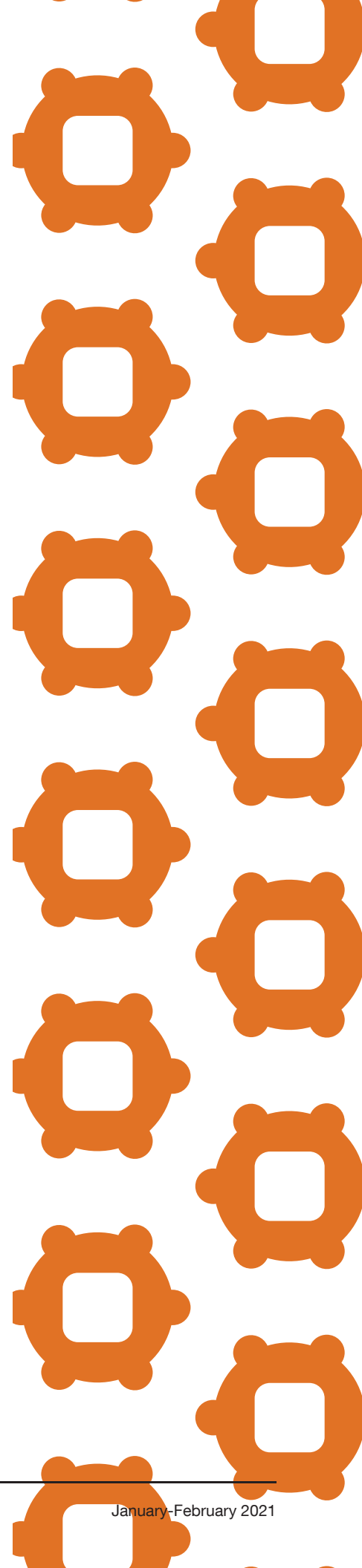
to the centres of fashion and design that have helped some suppliers in high-wage countries like Italy, defend niche markets for high-end products.

The challenges brought about by Covid-19 in 2020 will mark another turning point in the development of the apparel industry. While this article argues that a collective shift is required, individual actions by companies are going to be crucial to their respective fortunes. Here are four major changes Bangladeshi manufacturers must make to ensure they don't just survive, but come out of this crisis stronger.

1. Select partners wisely

The majority of manufacturers trade on open account terms with no protection against buyer default scenarios. This must change. Buyer assessment and risk mitigation must become core competencies for manufacturers looking to grow.

Manufacturers need to prepare for a world where not all demand is equal. With brands being forced into cancelling orders for their own survival, and contracts not being honored, a lack of trust has emerged across the industry. It is crucial for manufacturers to understand any risks associated with counterparties, whether they be established incumbents or emerging digital brands, to avoid a repeat of the pain and financial loss many have suffered in 2020. Manufacturers should be more thoughtful about partner selection. They need to choose



buyers just as carefully as buyers are choosing them. Luckily, there are many risk mitigation tools to help suppliers check the backgrounds and financial health of buyers. Buying trade insurance or payment guarantees is another method to avoid similar financial losses in the future. These services can help ensure that buyers are reliable, and foster more trust in the relationships again, which is key, especially during a time of so much instability.

Serai is partnering with the world's leading commercial data analytics provider and global trade credit insurers to help our customers assess the financial and credit risk of their trade partners. These solutions will be available in the coming weeks, including special offers and solutions exclusive to Serai customers.

2. Re-evaluate your value proposition

A quality product, delivered on time at a competitive price isn't enough to stand out in a crowded market with excess capacity. Manufacturers must find new differentiators.

The most innovative players add value to their offerings. Becoming more flexible on order size, providing trend analysis and developing design-led solutions are all ways to do so. These extensions outside the current proposition could also grow into new revenue streams.

Another aspect to this is understanding what is important to each brand, and adjusting your strategy accordingly. This could be placing more emphasis on sharing real time data, or

using more sustainable fabrics. The most agile manufacturers are able to accommodate what each of their brand partners is looking for.

3. Embrace transparency
Transparency is non-negotiable – and it's up to the suppliers to embrace it. Increased transparency leads to more trust. This will make you stand out from the crowd and eventually lead to better business.

New technologies allow suppliers to connect with their customers' data and link to these buyers' systems so that their supply chain is visible from end-to-end. Being the early adopters of these ethical and sustainable solutions allow manufacturers to differentiate themselves from other suppliers. More visibility will lead to more trust, and standing out from the crowd will eventually lead to better business.

Socially and environmentally conscious customers are demanding visibility into where and how the products they consume are made.

In a survey conducted by Fashion Revolution in 2018, "61% of people are interested in learning about what fashion brands are doing to minimise their impacts on the environment and to protect their workers' human rights." Investors are analysing ESG credentials as determinants of future financial performance. Regulators are introducing import restrictions to address concerns about forced labour.

4. Make the digital switch permanent

Covid-19 has accelerated the digitalisation of the global economy. There's no turning back because up and down the supply chain, everyone is digitising. APIs make tech integration simple, while Software as a Service (SaaS) platforms make tech adoption economical.

Manufacturers must look beyond their core activities to use this period of uncertainty to embrace the full suite of digital solutions at their disposal. This includes using and owning data. Manufacturers must fight for a world where information is owned by its originator, not just the recipient.

There are countless new technologies and tools available, which allow for quicker execution and enhanced business processes in all aspects of the apparel industry. Some specific examples of these innovative tools include E-sampling and 3D tools such as Browzwear, Optitex, and CLO, as well as quality and compliance companies such as Pivot88 and Qima.

Serai not only enables manufacturers to build and amplify their digital presence, but it is working with a wide range of leading technology providers to enable its users to access the best tools in the market on Serai in the near future.

Don't wait to be led.

In an industry where the standards and practices have typically been set by the brands and retailers, it may seem prudent to wait and see how things evolve. Manufacturers should not fall into that trap – doing so will put them in a reactionary position. Rather, manufacturers must take the lead and set the agenda. They must take a stand and lead the transition of the apparel industry.


In the end, who survives and who doesn't depends on how companies react to the situation. While some may view this as a doom and gloom scenario, Serai believes that there is always opportunity in a crisis.

Founded by HSBC, Serai is a business to business digital network for companies to build long term relationships and grow their business. Serai is starting with the Apparel industry and focussing on Bangladesh as its key market. Serai is entirely free to use!

The author is the CEO of Serai Ltd.

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Salute to Mr. Shamsuddin and all the heroes whose stories remain untold

By Apparel Story Desk

When factories reopened in April 26, 2020, after a month of lockdown, apprehension started soaring and criticism pouring in from every corner, instilling fear of looming disaster in the RMG sector due to Covid pandemic. But what we have seen now is a sharp contrast to the scenario that was widely speculated.

Yes, infection in the RMG industry is insignificant after four months of factory operations amid the pandemic. The success surprised many, but the going has not been easy. The success in holding back Covid in the factories has only been possible due to the tireless efforts from the industry and sincerity and sacrifices from the entrepreneurs.

A. B. M Shamsuddin, the chairman and owner of Hannan Group, is a shining example of how workers were cared for to protect them in the pandemic. He has fought a tough battle against Covid-19 in Bangladesh, and came out victorious with flying colours. When the factories reopened, Mr. Shamsuddin, 65, rented nine buildings in Gazipur to make

sure all of his 12,000 workers were well taken care of and are quarantined if they were suspected to have been infected with Covid-19.

Despite of hardship caused by rampant order cancellation from buyers, Mr. Shamsuddin didn't leave his workers behind in these difficult times. Rather, he made sure that workers suspected of being infected didn't spread the disease in their homes and communities. Each of the suspected workers were screened with the help of a medical team of six doctors and equal numbers of nurses. His company paid for their food, medicine and every tiny thing they needed while they were quarantined. He bought flasks for each of them so that they could drink hot water and ginger, and cardamom laced tea. All the workers were paid their wages, including Eid bonuses. He organised Covid tests for suspected workers at his own cost. Suspect cases spent a mandatory 14 days in the quarantine centres while the infected housed at the centres for as long as it took them to recover.

Two months later all the workers have recovered and resumed work. It cost him BDT 20 million. "It was like a war of independence," said Mr. Shamsuddin, who as a 15-year-old boy went to Major Haider in 1971 to join our liberation struggle. "It was an experience of a lifetime. When all my friends confined themselves at home, I was in the middle of a war. And by the grace of Almighty Allah, none of our workers have died or lost jobs," he said. Mr. Shamsuddin is a shining example of how many factory owners fought this battle - but their stories remain untold. While it's true he has gone to extraordinary length to ensure safety for his workers, and not everyone has the same capacity, it is also true that each factory owner tried their level best according to the best of their ability to ensure workers safety. This industry-wide effort has resulted in the success of limiting the infection to such small percentage.

We salute Mr. Shamsuddin and all the heroes whose stories remain untold.

Technology Upgradation Fund: *Need of the Time*

By Mohammad Manower Hossain

We now stand at the periphery of the 4th Industrial Revolution (4IR) or industry 4.0. This is also known as the era of disruptive technology, meaning any technology that is popular today could be obsolete in the very next day. Bangladesh RMG industry started its journey in early 1980s in an unplanned manner and no one would have imagined that Bangladesh could grow to be the 2nd largest apparel manufacturer of the world. Though Bangladesh is the 2nd largest apparel exporter of the world after China, Bangladesh's market share in the global value chain is as little as 6.83% where China occupies 30.81% of the pie. This is not the only disparity we have with China, our productivity compared to China is very poor and one of the lowest amongst the major apparel exporters of the world.

We have lack of expertise in terms of modernization of technology coupled with trained human resources to keep our foothold equal to other competitive countries. Standing on this harsh reality we cannot stay indifferent. In recent times (2014-2018) we have found that our cost of production has increased by around 30%, on top of that worker minimum wages have been enhanced by almost 381% since 2010 with a provision of 5% annual

increment. Despite the impact of Covid-19, the Bangladesh RMG industry was suffering in different areas like productivity, lead time, profitability, etc. In this time we have also seen that global demand for sustainable products are increasing, consumers are increasingly asking for products with a lower carbon footprint. Circular fashion, up-cycling, recycling is gaining popularity alongside custom-made designed apparel. Apparel brands are also coming up with new pledges to their customers, who require modern technologies like digital sampling, IOT, block chain and other things to ensure sustainable material mix and traceability.

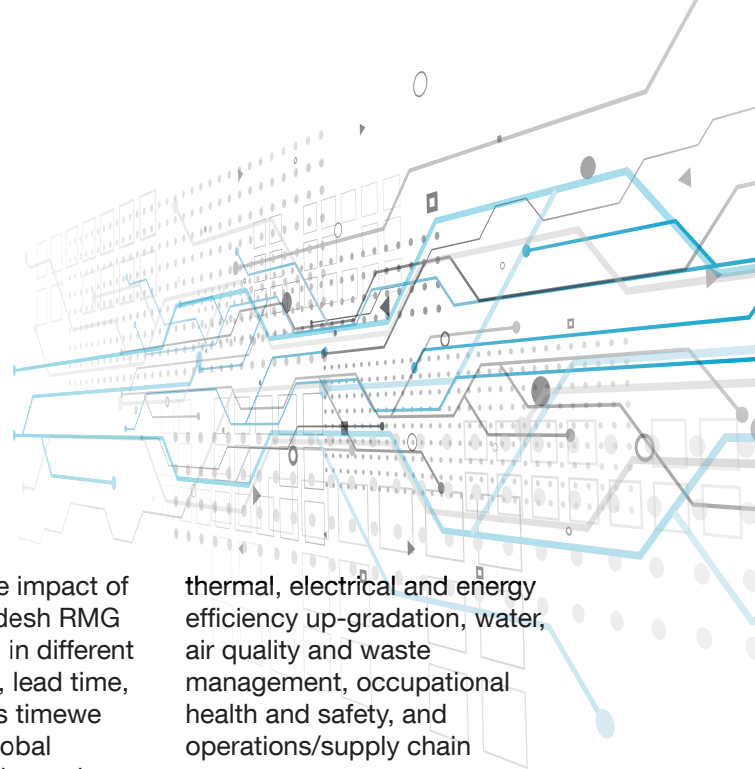
In this backdrop there is no alternative to technology up-gradation keep the RMG industry competitive. Technology up-gradation is the need of the hour not only to remain cost and time competitive, but also to be resource-efficient and environmentally-sustainable, in order to be able to better align with the priorities of the national global strategic targets and goals.

There are number of areas in the overall industrial operations where advanced technologies can bring in efficiencies, e.g. business process automation and re-engineering, advanced manufacturing technologies,

thermal, electrical and energy efficiency up-gradation, water, air quality and waste management, occupational health and safety, and operations/supply chain management.

While sustainability has become an emerging global priority, there are challenges for the industries to adopt sustainable practices. Higher cost and lack of competitive financing are among the top rated challenges. There are 'low hanging' technologies like - G-trap for steam iron, condensate recovery and return system, hot water module, engineered steam and condensate distribution system, boiler economizer, EGB boiler, incineration boiler, and HVLS fan which need to be promoted and made easily accessible for the factories.

The industry also has tremendous scope to improve energy efficiency, thus reducing the carbon footprint, and save natural resources by adopting technologies like - Power Factor Correction, advanced LED lamps, direct drive exhaust fan, Guerrilla ceiling fan, load management system, optimization of compressed air system, automation of operation of unattended usage of light & appliances, etc.





Carbon footprint reduction is one of the core areas of concern globally. Shifting toward renewable energy sources is one of the key strategies to reduce the carbon footprint of Bangladesh. Without resource decoupling Bangladesh cannot keep its growth up in a resilient manner. Based on available useable solar electricity within the industrial facility, a factory can install a properly designed solar PV system of reliable and dependable technology in operation and maintenance. Renewable energy reduces carbon footprint of products.

In recent years we have seen numerous pledges from the global fashion brands to shift the

global linear economy to the circular economy. A recent McKinsey report suggested that adopting circular economy can help the “Race to Zero” by 10% in terms of GHGs emission reduction. Circular economy is also strongly connected to the SDGs-12 on “Sustainable consumption and production”. Shifting to circular economy is not only important for the Bangladesh RMG industry but also for the overall national SDGs achievement of Bangladesh. The circular economy requires adaptation of new and upgraded technologies to be able to close the loop of linear unsustainable economic practice.

In the post-Covid-19 world, emergence of virtual sampling through advance software and product development by digital simulation is getting popular; which is not only productive and fast but also inevitable in a pandemic world. Such software and digital platforms require broader adoptability to be aligned with the fashion brands. Moreover, there is no such funding mechanism available to address the need of entrepreneurs to adopt such expensive software and digital systems.

In these circumstances, as the apex trade body of the apparel industry of Bangladesh the BGMEA is pursuing the government of Bangladesh for a technology up-gradation fund to help the industry adopt new technologies. Considering the rationale of the BGMEA's proposition the Bangladesh Bank in light of the Export Policy 2018-19 has developed a Tk. 1000cr "Technology Development Fund" to provide low-cost loans to export-oriented industries to upgrade technologies they

presently use. The tenure of the fund is from 3-5 years, while interest rate is 5-6% with one year of grace period depending on bank-client relationship.

Already nine banks and five NBFIs (non-bank financial institutions) have signed deal with the Bangladesh Bank for disbursing loan to the export-oriented industries from the fund. The Banks and NBFIs are Eastern Bank, Mutual Trust Bank, Mercantile Bank, Brac Bank, Southeast Bank, Exim Bank, Premier Bank, NRB Bank,

Krishi Bank, IPDC Finance, IDLC Finance, Bangladesh Finance and Investment Company Ltd, United Finance, and Infrastructure Development Company.

BGMEA has closely worked with the Bangladesh Bank to develop this comprehensive technology up-gradation fund from which the RMG entrepreneurs can avail required funds to upgrade their production plants and make the factories productive, efficient, sustainable and digital.





BGMEA to launch Center of Innovation, Efficiency and OSH

BGMEA has taken an initiative to set up a "Center of Innovation, Efficiency and OSH" for its member factories, in an effort to increase competitiveness in the garment industry.

BGMEA has signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with aamra resources limited (ARL) in this regard on 14 December.

BGMEA President Dr Rubana Huq and CEO of aamra resources limited Sohel Ahmed signed the agreement on behalf of their respective organisations.

Under the MoU, the ARL will provide software facility as a courtesy at the BGMEA center.



2nd wave of Covid: BGMEA President calls for policy support for RMG sector to survive

At a time when the garment industry of Bangladesh is recovering from the damages caused by the pandemic, a second wave of coronavirus has already started taking toll on the sector again.

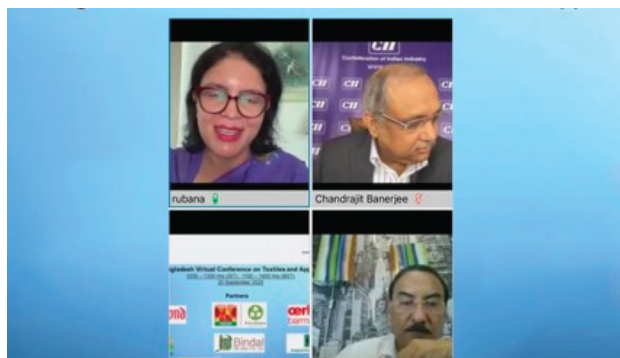
BGMEA President Dr. Rubana Huq urged for the government's policy support to help the RMG industry to sustain in this critical situation.

The BGMEA President made the call while addressing a dialogue series on the government initiatives for recovery from the Covid-19 fallout in Bangladesh. The Finance Division and the Ministry of Finance organized the event in Dhaka on 26 November.

Honorable Commerce Minister Tipu Munshi attended the program as chief guest while Principal Secretary to the Honorable Prime Minister Dr. Ahmad Kaikaus was present at special guest.

"Quick response from the government with timely policy support including stimulus packages and time extension for non-classification of loan account helped the RMG industry in its struggle to turn around and survive amid by the Covid pandemic which has wreaked a havoc on the industry."

"On behalf of the apparel industry, I would like to express our sincere thanks and gratitude towards Honorable Prime Minister of Bangladesh Sheikh Hasina for providing stimulus package of 5 thousand crore taka loan for paying the salary of garment workers. While this support helped the industry to stay in business by paying salary to the workers, it also saved the livelihoods of 4.1 million garment workers," the BGMEA President said.



Regional cooperation stressed to boost textiles and apparel sector in Bangladesh – India

Bangladesh and India have underscored the need for regional cooperation for boosting the textiles and apparel sector in both countries and manufacturing for the world, facilitating mutual investments, building value chains and, creating a robust ecosystem for the new normal.

The emphasis was laid in at the ‘India-Bangladesh Virtual Conference on Textiles and Apparel Sector’ jointly organised by Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) and Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FBCCI) on 30 September.

Golam Dastagir Gazi (Birpatik), Honorable Minister, Ministry of Textiles and Jute, Government of Bangladesh, and Smriti Zubin Irani, Honorable Minister, Ministry of Textiles, and Ministry of Women & Child Development, Government of India attended the conference.

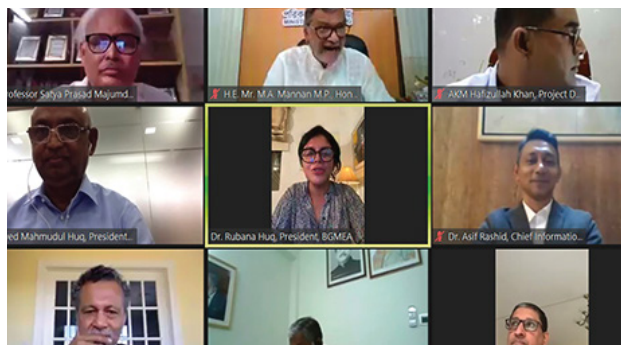
Business leaders from Bangladesh and India took part in the virtual meet and made their observations on how both countries can leverage mutual synergies to harness the untapped potential in textiles and apparel Sector.

Bangladesh’s Textiles and Jute Minister Golam Dastagir Gazi pointed out that there was a huge potential for further collaboration between Bangladesh and India in the textile and apparel industry, with opportunities for both countries.

He said that barriers to trade in the textile trade of the two countries will be resolved through mutual discussion. Indian Textiles Minister Smriti Irani has asked Bangladesh to increase its textile sourcing from India.

In her address BGMEA President Dr. Rubana Huq said that a regional collaborative integration would be of immense value to the entire region.

“This is not a time for competition, it is time for collaborative competition. So, the new world is actually ‘coopetition’. If we follow that lead and collaborate, who can stop us from being the biggest brand for the whole world in terms of South Asia. We are actually positioned to become that brand,” she said.



RMG industry should get prepared for 4IR: BGMEA President

The RMG industry of Bangladesh needs to get prepared to embrace the opportunities and face the challenges posed by Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR).

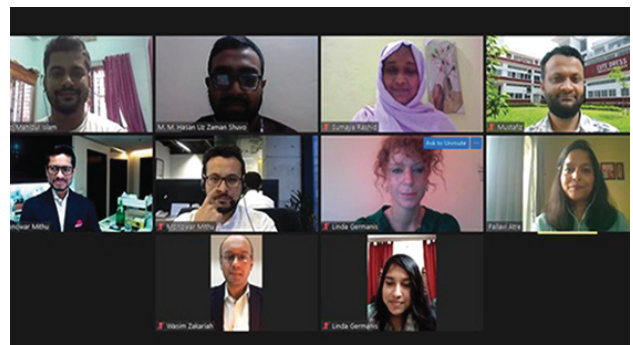
“Only 8 percent of jobs in the RMG sector is automated. We hope by 2025 will be reaching 25 percent. But how do we transform production chain? If we can increase

level of literacy and bring in coding and mathematics as a compulsory subject at primary level education, then we could have changed the scenario. As we don’t have that now, we can’t hope for overnight transformation,” said Dr. Rubana Huq, President, Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA).

In her address Dr. Rubana Huq also underscored the need for investing in AI. “Are we investing enough in AI? More than 150 billion dollars are being put for investment in robotics engineering. Where are we stand right now?”

“From BGMEA we tried with a2i and told them that one of the most basic things to do is to go through factory floors and check out what the industry needs – what software and hardware are needed. We can have a lot of homegrown solutions at this point of time. We have enough intelligent engineers in Bangladesh and a sync between academia and industry is absolutely needed,” she said

While 75 million are supposed to loss job, 133 million people are supposed to be gaining. So, there are always opportunities where challenges are, Dr. Huq added.



UNDP, GRI and BGMEA to support garment factories to align with SDGs

BGMEA organized a workshop to brief garment factories on how to align their activities with Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) and showcase them through SDG Reporting.

Miran Ali, Director at BGMEA; Wasim Zakariah, Chairman, BGMEA Standing Committee on RDTI and SDG; Sheikh H M Mustafiz, Chairman, BGMEA Standing Committee on RSC-Environment, Linda Germanis, Private Sector Engagement Specialist, UNDP; and Pallavi Atre, Sustainability Expert, Global Reporting Initiative (GRI) South Asia attended the workshop held on 22 October where representatives of 20 garment factories also took part.

Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) are one of the most important strategic areas of concern for the Government of Bangladesh. The RMG industry of Bangladesh is playing an important role in attaining the goals. The contribution of the private sector is critical for the overall socio-economic development of the country.



**CRUISING WITH IMPECCABLE
RECORD OF SAFETY AND SERVICE
STANDARD TO SOAR HIGHER.
GRATITUDE TO OUR PASSENGER AND
PATRONS FOR BEING AT OUR WINGS.**