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BSF shootings are not stopping

What about India's promise of bringing down the number of casualties to zero?

THE way the Indian Border Security Force has been killing Bangladeshi nationals on a regular basis makes us wonder why, despite many flag meetings between the two sides to resolve the issue, such shootings continue and lives are lost. On July 4, the BSF shot a 50-year-old Bangladeshi man along the Telkupi border of Shibganj upazila in Chapainawabganj. According to the local UP chairman, the man went to the area to cut grass for the livestock. Called by some BSF men, he crossed the border. About an hour later, the BSF members dumped his body into Bangladesh's territory. There were bullet wounds and injury marks in his body. On July 3, the BSF killed another Bangladeshi national in Jashore's Benapole border. Several other incidents of BSF's killing were reported in the media in the last few months. One such horrible incident was the killing of an SSC examinee in Panchagarh Sadar on April 19. Reportedly, a BSF man entered inside Bangladesh territory and shot the boy dead.

Violence and killing on the border by the BSF continue despite repeated assurances made by the Indian side of bringing down the border casualties to zero. Last year, 43 Bangladeshis were killed by trigger-happy BSF members, according to Ain O Salish Kendra. And from January until May this year, 14 Bangladeshis were shot dead while 4 others were tortured to death by them. During the same time, 12 Bangladeshis were abducted and 11 were injured, estimates the rights body.

Killing unarmed and defenceless people is nothing but cold-blooded murder and the BSF must stop these routine killings. The BSF high command must keep the promises they made during the bilateral meetings held last year—they must bring down the casualty to zero by using non-lethal force to deter people trying to cross the border illegally. Torture by the BSF members must also come to an end. At the same time, the BGB should also ensure greater vigilance and monitoring on the borders to ensure our people's security. And most importantly, our government must raise its voice about the killing and torture of its own people at the hands of the BSF members. The Indian government must take steps to stop these shootings.

Covid-19 shouldn't detract us from other public health risks

Beware of dengue outbreak

NOT very long ago we had warned the administration to initiate actions to thwart a dengue onslaught, starting with anti-dengue drives by the two city corporations. Dhaka being where there was the largest number of dengue affected cases last year. We had enough data then to suggest a likely surge in the incidence of the deadly disease. And in fact, not a month has gone by without reports on dengue danger in the media.

We believe that the threat has not diminished a bit, in fact the risk remains, the ominous prospect exacerbated by the manner the Aedes mosquitoes have been allowed to breed. The rain had come sooner than expected and will last longer than usual, affording the vermin a longer breeding time. Experts have put us on notice of an outbreak between now and September, the period when cases are likely to peak.

While we notice that the anti-mosquito drive was launched with some fanfare in June, it was for 10 days only, for example in DNCC areas, which really is not enough. It must be continuous till we succeed in diminishing the threat. A 10-day combing operation cannot ensure destruction of all the breeding grounds of Aedes mosquitoes. And we say this because, as reported recently by the team leader of a project under Jahangirnagar University, there is still a high density of Aedes mosquito at different parts of the capital, which enhances the possibility of increasing dengue cases in August. The project carried out tests in six areas of Dhaka city in June in both North and South of the capital and found the Breteau Index (BI) over 20, an alarming level of Aedes mosquito density.

Admittedly, we are under the vicious grip of a dangerous pandemic. And it's quite likely that people's attention is too focused on this to think about other things. We have also seen that the pandemic has all but suspended treatment to general patients. The administration must have all necessary arrangements to deal with dengue patients efficiently, drawing lessons from the loopholes last year in the anti-mosquito drive, as well as the Covid-19 experience so far.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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Stop fooling students

In the wake of this pandemic, "business" in the name of providing "private university education" has not stopped. Rather, it has gained more momentum. It is unfortunate that no one is paying attention to this. I am a student of a popular private university, and my institution continues to teach online, despite not having any permission from the UGC for online classes. Sadly, it is not benefitting students at all.

On the contrary, we have been paying our fees according to the university's demand, even though most of us are going through a financial crisis. There has been no flexibility in paying our tuition fees, rather we are being pressured constantly, and the university is collecting "extra money" from us without issuing any notice. They are manipulating us to pay and continue our so called "education" and this is unacceptable. Therefore, I urge the concerned authorities to investigate the matter thoroughly and stop this scam.

Saeed Hasan Tareq, Dhaka

Green economic recovery from corona pandemic

MACRO MIRROR



FAHMIDA KHATUN

THE ongoing economic recession due to coronavirus pandemic has created opportunities for countries to replace the standard growth path with the green growth. There is a renewed effort

in many developed and developing countries to adopt a green recovery path in the backdrop of economic recession due to Covid-19. This is about reviving the economy through investment on green technology which will not degrade the environment and exhaust natural resources, but will create jobs. The pattern of growth will rely on investment in the environment as a major driver of economic development. This is opposed to the currently followed growth pattern that destroys environmental resources and emits carbon dioxide (CO2).

Thus, as countries have planned stimulus packages for economic recovery, global leaders have now called for green recovery. The impact of Covid-19 has been devastating on the lives and livelihoods across the world as the economy slowed down. This has reduced emission of CO2 significantly. However, as the economies across the world have started to reopen CO2 emission has also started to increase. Clearly, with faster pace of economic recovery, carbon emissions will also pick up faster. Therefore, many countries have proposed for green recovery by cutting carbon emission while reviving the economy.

Several European countries have put a "European Green Deal" at the heart of corona recovery efforts. The recovery fund of the European Commission amounts to about USD 848 billion so far. This will be invested in coronavirus recovery as well as green programmes to create jobs. The European Union announced that 25 percent of its budget will be reserved for climate action. But whether the recovery package will also set aside 25 percent for climate spending is unclear till now.

Denmark has set its ambition to cut carbon emissions by 70 percent from 1990 levels. It also aims to export clean energy by 2030. Despite coronavirus, the government of Denmark announced its strategy in May 2020 to meet its climate targets including generation of wind power, carbon capture and storage, and improving energy efficiency. The country will also create new jobs by making green investments. Germany has planned a

stimulus package worth USD 146 billion till June 2020. This package has a number of green plans. About 38 percent of the stimulus has been allocated for future friendly Germany. It aims for energy transition for a sustainable path. The UK government has also taken initiative to explore green recovery by establishing five working groups who will evaluate recovery measures.

Among the Asian countries, China and South Korea have taken major plans towards green economic recovery. China has introduced the "new infrastructure" concept which will include low-carbon transport, 5G and ultra-high voltage electricity transmission. The country has made a six-year plan during 2020-25 for a low-carbon stimulus package amounting

packages for investment in green infrastructure such as public transport, energy efficient public buildings, renewable energy, smart grids, water and sanitation, pollution control, green technology investment and green research and development. Unfortunately, carbon emission after the GFC went back to the pre-GFC period. Investment in traditional infrastructure and increase in consumption resulted in higher CO2 emission and air pollution.

At present while green plans are being laid out along with stimulus packages, many contradictory policies are also being pursued parallelly. One of the most harmful as well as debated one is the subsidy on fossil fuels. In its recent proposal for corona recovery, though the

widespread nature of the impact there should be initiatives at the national level. This will mostly be in areas of strategising, planning and designing efforts to combat the negative impact of climate change and also in resource allocation for the cause.

Bangladesh also has to adopt a green economic path in order to reduce the burden of future environmental cost. It can make a gradual shift towards green growth through investment in the environment for economic recovery and sustainable growth, decent job creation and poverty reduction. There can be a number of areas for intervention to adopt a green growth policy in the context of Bangladesh. These include: green infrastructure such as energy efficient buildings; green energy generation, such as solar energy; energy saving measures for housing; water management, water desalination, treatment of wastewater, solid waste infrastructure to support, clean water; secure alternative water sources, such as rain water; coastal area development and management; reforestation; environment related R&D; public transport, railways, foot and bike paths.

A list of fiscal measures may include tax incentives for investments on energy efficient building; support for energy efficient bulbs; fiscal benefits for installation of solar panels in private buildings; low interest rate for loans to support low carbon technologies; tax rebate for environmentally friendly cars; measures to increase energy efficiency in industry and agriculture; allocation for protected areas and cultural heritage; support for environmental research and development.

Bangladesh's stimulus package to deal with the impact of Covid-19 amounts to about 4 percent of its gross domestic product. However, there is only an insignificant stimulus for green recovery. The central bank has doubled the size of its refinancing scheme from Tk 200 crore to Tk 400 crore for entrepreneurs who intend to take up green projects. Apart from this no other distinct allocation has been made for green recovery. In fact, large entrepreneurs which are eligible to receive loans from banks at a lower interest rate may well include the polluting industries. This requires close monitoring of the environment authorities. Though Bangladesh is a negligible emitter of CO2, it should plan for a greener economy to prepare for the future. And now is the time when fiscal measures are being undertaken to build back the economy.

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to USD 1.4 trillion. It may be recalled that China's stimulus package amounted to USD 586 billion during the Global Financial Crisis (GFC) in 2008-09. Of this, about USD 221 billion was for green investments.

South Korea has announced its ambitious "Green New Deal" climate plan to revive its economy from Covid-19. The country plans to invest USD 10.8 billion by 2022 through this deal to boost green energy sector and create thousands of jobs. Under this new plan the country will reduce its dependence on coal and increase renewable energy production to 20 percent by 2030. During GFC in 2008-09, about 80 percent of the Korean stimulus package was allocated for green projects and create about one million jobs in environmentally friendly fields.

In the past, during the GFC in 2008-09 several countries provided stimulus

EU is expected to exclude investments in high-polluting infrastructure, there are concerns that this proposal may also include spending on fossil-fuel. South Korea, on the other hand, has kept allocation from its economic relief package for the polluting industries such as aviation and shipbuilding. China will rely on coal for economic recovery which has created concerns among environmentalists.

So, countries will have to make their commitments firm and transparent if they really want to follow a green path. It has been estimated that the removal of fossil fuel subsidies in emerging and developing countries will not only reduce global greenhouse gas emission by 10 percent by 2050 but also increase efficiency of these economies.

Bangladesh is the worst victim of climate change. Given the massive and

Where next for our industry beyond Covid-19?

RMG NOTES



MOSTAFIZ UDDIN

THREE months after most of the major global markets of Bangladesh garments entered a lockdown period and closed many of their shops, we are beginning to get a better picture of how the

industry might look as we move beyond Covid-19.

The most obvious thing to state right now is that it does not look like we will return to business as usual any time soon. In fact, it is looking more and more like we will all be operating in a very different environment once the dust settles.

Among our customers—brands and retailers—a few trends have become obvious. The first is that there has been an obvious move towards online sales during lockdown. Online clothing sales have rocketed for the likes of H&M and Inditex. Both these major retailers say they expect large swathes of this shift towards digital to be permanent.

Another, arguably more significant trend, is the industry talk of moving towards a more sustainable industry. There is a renewed push towards slower fashion and the discussion about the environmental problems associated with fast fashion have once again been reignited.

On social media, the hashtag #BounceBackBetter has been trending for several weeks. Influential bodies in our industry have been saying that now is the time for the industry to change and that Covid-19 has brought forward many conversations which should have been happening anyway. We are producing too much clothing and we have to slow down.

These are reasonable points, although there are social issues for Bangladesh here which cannot be ignored.

What does all this mean for Bangladesh ready-made garment factories? The short message is that only the strong will survive. We have all spent the past few months licking our wounds as orders have dried up and customers have failed to pay their bills. That's unfortunate but there is no changing it now; we are all in

the same boat so we just have to roll up our sleeves and get on with it.

What is important is what we do collectively as an industry. There are a number of changes I see. Firstly, I think we may see a move towards lower minimum order quantities (MOQs). Our customer base is shifting, becoming increasingly seamless and responding faster than ever to the demands of their own customers—the public. As suppliers, we have to be ready to respond—to be more nimble, agile and flexible in our offerings. The ability to respond rapidly to demands for small, niche lines could be vital in the new landscape.



What will emerge in 2021 will almost certainly be a more compacted industry.

Secondly, I see a move towards even shorter lead times. Pressure on our RMG sector is already immense but, in future, it will more than ever be a buyer's market. Things are not going to get easier beyond Covid-19. A rationalisation of the industry at our end is inevitable, and suppliers will have to respond accordingly. Those who survive in the new landscape will be the cream of the crop.

Thirdly, as consumers re-assess their priorities in the post-Covid-19 world, it's likely that elements of discretionary spending will be challenged. As more companies realised their staff can work from home, less people will go to office. Hence, there will be less dressing up. People are not attending events now and therefore there will also be less appetite for new clothes. When the less is more,

Fourthly, though lockdown in the western cities are gradually being relaxed, the protective lifestyle will not go away very soon as the risk of reinfection of the virus will always loom large. Hence, personal protective products will take a permanent and prime place in the shelves of shops. So, factories should include these types of protective apparel in their product categories. There is no doubt that the apparel manufacturers who will experiment and explore diversified PPE production will have more opportunities in the post-Covid-19 world.

Fifthly, manufacturers must change the ways they used to think. The pandemic has proved "remote working" is realistic. That means a garment factory in Gazipur or Naranyanganj can easily hire a designer, brand marketer or sales manager

in Paris or Barcelona, pay only a freelance rate and start to build a direct business. Technology during this pandemic showed that no one has a monopoly to communicate. This means that many people in the middle will become obsolete. A small factory with almost no investment overseas can reach out and engage with a brand in Europe, USA or Japan, and use technology to build and earn trust. This was previously thought impossible. It was thought that one had to have a big budget to physically be present to build a reputation or earn trust in overseas markets.

Sixthly, the pandemic has shown that physical location is irrelevant, more relevant are skills and expertise. So, garment factories will need to invest in soft skills such as in design thinking, marketing, branding, etc. Apart from the hard skills of producing good garments, they will need even more people who can communicate as who communicates best will win in the race of business now.

Seventhly, the next few months will be very tough for our sector and factories will close. Workers will lose their jobs. We must all support one another in these most challenging of times. More difficult than ever will be forecast volumes because consumers' behaviours will be unpredictable in the rest of this year and even in the next. So, brands and retailers together with suppliers need to find smart ideas on how to further decrease lead times with calculated risk. Therefore, to survive and to be successful it's essential to have close cooperation and partnership between the buyers and manufacturers. Problems need to be solved together and successes should be shared together. Only then it will be possible to be powerful and flexible.

Finally, what will emerge in 2021 will almost certainly be a more compacted industry. We may all have to revise our growth plans, if we are being realistic. But who knows—maybe it will also be an industry in which sustainability is truly embedded into operations rather than just be an afterthought. Covid-19 has brought the worst of times to our industry but, believe it or not, there are more important things in life than this dreadful disease—most notably, the future of our planet.

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