

Small can be beautiful in a post-Covid world



RMG NOTES
MOSTAFIZ UDDIN

THE huge changes we are seeing in the global apparel industry right now are bewildering and unsettling for many of us. A tsunami has swept through the Bangladesh apparel sector and it is hard to believe that things will ever be quite the same again in our industry. Perhaps I am wrong, although whatever happens, the scars from the pandemic and the damage it has inflicted on our business community will be long-lasting.

Moreover, the pandemic is far from over. Across Europe, our main export market, countries are still opening and closing, locking down one week, opening up the next. Spikes in coronavirus cases have got governments everywhere running scared, while consumers are staying at home, worried about heading to the high street for fear of catching the deadly disease.

This all impacts us as manufacturers. It would be remiss of me to even attempt to estimate what Bangladesh RMG exports will be over the next few months and how much of a fall-off we may see over a 12-month period. Every business in our industry is struggling right now and double-digit falls in production are inevitable.

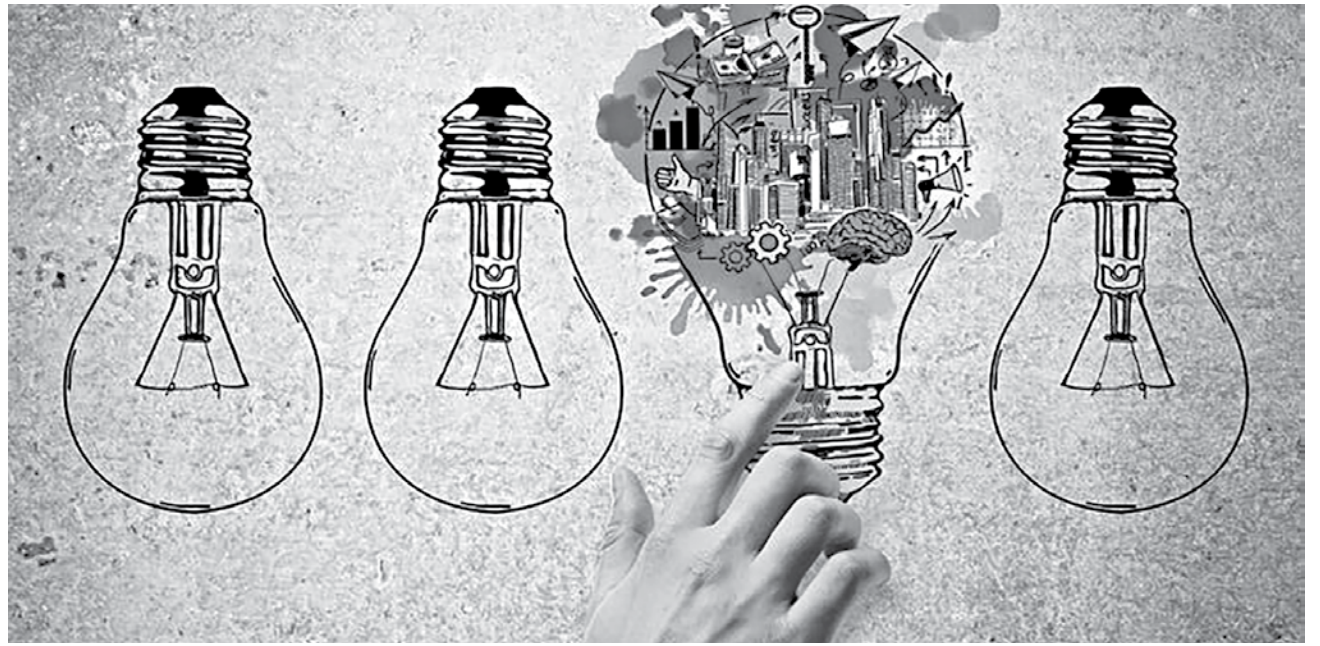
All that said, history tells us that from crisis, comes opportunities—it is just a matter of who is ready to take them.

One thing I think we will see more of in the coming months and years is the growth of grassroots success stories. It used to be that if you wanted to have influence, you needed size and scale,

and the apparel and textile industry is a classic example of that. Size has traditionally mattered.

Moving forwards, I sense this picture may change. One of the problems with being a large business is that it is difficult to respond quickly to sharp economic shocks, the likes of which we are experiencing at the moment. Few would want to be steering the ship of a global retailer right now. Beyond the largest companies of all, the fact is that ALL companies are vulnerable, and I include the apparel industry in that. Many will go to the wall in the next 12-months simply because their overheads are so high, and they cannot afford to continue incurring losses of major markets going on lockdown.

As the market changes, as powerful market dynamics sweep through the industry, this will create opportunities for small, nimble players. That's why I talk about grassroots organisations—



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businesses that can get up close and personal with their customers and take advantage of the uncertainty in the marketplace.

Social media marketing makes it relatively easy right now to spread the word about a small business and quickly to create a brand and win a loyal following.

In the apparel industry this could bring serious opportunities. There has been talk for years of apparel manufacturers selling directly to end consumers. This has never really taken off in the way it should have as manufacturers have found it easier to deal directly with brands, where they don't have to worry about issues such as marketing, PR, dealing with end consumers and so on.

I think now is the time that a business model of apparel manufacturer selling directly to end

consumers could take off. Such a model could start small but think big. A couple of years ago, when the market was stable and conservative with small quantity, I would not have seen such a model gaining much traction. Ironically, at a time when there is so much uncertainty around, I believe this type of model has the greatest chance of working. Let us be honest—many of our manufacturers have very little to lose at the present time; at the very least, they could be exploring such an approach.

I don't see this pandemic going away soon and the worst thing that any business could do would be to sit and wait for it to pass over, hoping it will be business as usual in 2021.

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business owners sit licking their wounds, mourning for the good old days, the movers and shakers of this world are looking for the next big opportunity. That's not to be flippant and make light of our current woes, rather, to point out that there are opportunities out there, new ideas are gaining traction and the world is changing before our very eyes.

I believe that being small and starting from not very much at all need not count against you in this brave new world. In fact it might be an advantage, providing the fleetness of foot required to go out and seize the day in this most strange and challenging of economic environments.

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Parental overprotection: Why is it not questioned?

ARAF MOMEN AKA

THE policy of protectionism is loosely referred to as the policy where an entity of higher authority, whether it is a guardian or the government of a state, closely monitors and controls another entity.

What I, as a young adult, am interested to discuss, is the protectionism that occurs on a smaller scale. That is, within the household only. And within a household, the guardians would often be the parent(s), since if any grandparents were to live in the common South Asian household, it is more likely that they would relinquish the responsibility to their kin. And the children are too young or inexperienced to take major decisions yet.

Now the relationship between parents and their children is no doubt sophisticated and rather complicated. Parents undoubtedly have far more experience about the world than their children. But what I would like to point out is the level of control parents exert upon their children. There is a reason why stereotypes exist about South Asian parents being overly strict and excessively involved in their children's lives: that is because this stereotype is generally true.

Parents in South Asian middle-and-higher-income households tend to be very much involved in their children's lives for a very long time, often up to their children's late-20s. This involvement can sometimes be based on the notion that their children have not grown up. Some parents often take it to the extreme of micromanaging every move their children make and have significant control over the

decisions of their children.

That does not mean that parental involvement in a child's life is a bad thing. There is no doubt that children need someone to give them several nudges in the right direction, someone to teach them about the outside world, and someone to nurture them until they grow up to become functional adults. And their parents are the ones who are supposed to fulfil that role. Children who have absent parents can suffer from a poor upbringing. However, there is a difference between being there for your children when they need you, and being an

overbearing presence above your children.

Much like the drawback of protectionism where local firms are unable to cope with the new competitive environment once the government suddenly opens the market up to the world, the children know very little of what to do once they "leave the nest", because every decision that they were supposed to make by themselves, were often made for them by their guardians.

While the young adults that leave their nests are not oblivious, they tend to suffer from indecisiveness—often

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suffer having a dangerously low self-esteem throughout their lives and are incredibly susceptible to self-harm.

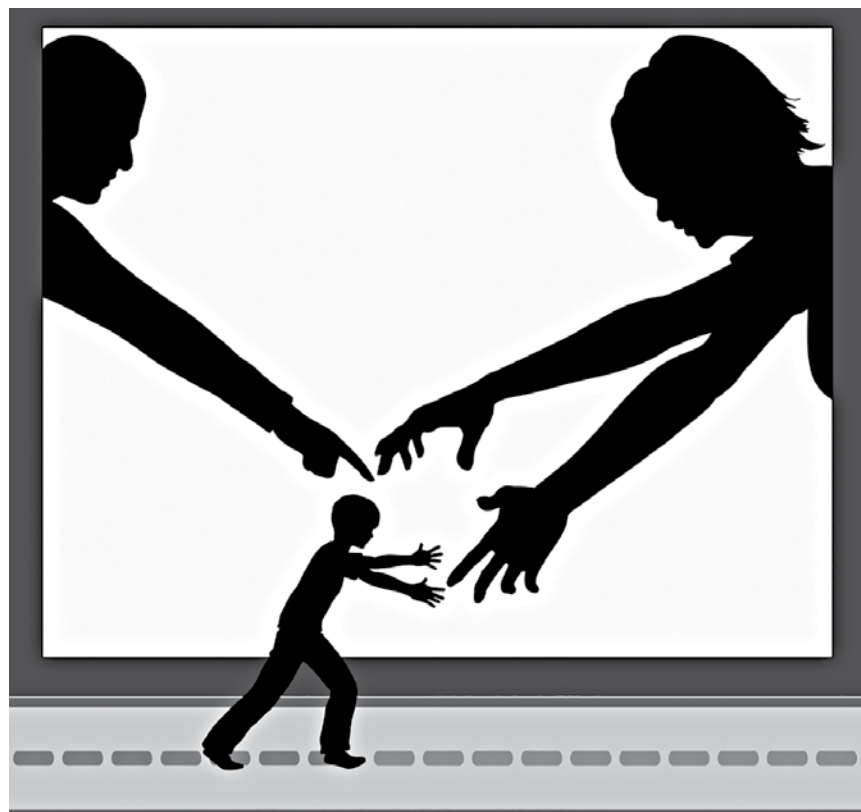
Sadly, parents often resort to such over-controlling behaviour thinking that they are doing the best for their children, without realising how they are stifling their child in the process. Most parents do not even know that they are suffocating their children with their own rules and expectations, and are actually pushing their children away.

Parenting is no easy task. Taking the decision to bring another human being into the world and taking up the responsibility to nurture that infant into a functioning and healthy adult is nothing short of a monumental task. The dedication and sheer willpower needed to properly raise a child is immense. However, all that effort could go in vain if the upbringing eventually ends up with the child growing up into an indecisive young adult who finds him/herself to be incapable of taking major decisions every now and then.

Being frank with one's children and expecting the same frankness from their side would be a good start. Instead of pushing ideologies onto them, parents should try to know their views once they are old enough to have their own philosophies. Listen and act accordingly. If something they believe seem wrong, explain to them why that is instead of talking down to them.

Protecting your children from the evils of the world is a necessity, but try not to make them think that they cannot tackle those evils themselves. Do not fall into the stereotype of South Asian parents.

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they cannot decide for themselves what to do with their lives after they venture out to live on their own. And this sometimes creates bitterness and leads them to develop mental health issues because of certain dissatisfaction, stress, unfulfilled desires, etc.

Despite how much the problem of parental protectionism sounds like the ramblings of a first-world problem, it still exists in the third world. This does not eliminate the fact that there are many children born into strife and poverty, and survival is a bigger priority than having a fulfilling life to look forward to.

But returning to parental protectionism, sometimes the overshadowing presence of the parents or guardians over a child, teen, or even a young adult can be so overwhelming, that it may border on abuse. Such as in the case where parents expect their views to be treated as the gospel truth by their children, and to be followed as such. And if those views are not followed accordingly, and expectations are not matched, their children are belittled to the extent that they

QUOTABLE Quote

FREDERICK DOUGLASS
(1818-1895)
African American who was one of the most eminent human rights leaders.

Those who profess to favor freedom, and yet depreciate agitation, are men who want crops without plowing up the ground.

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS

- 1 Expansive
- 5 Brooch part
- 10 Rap sheet name
- 12 Led Zeppelin's "Whole - Love"
- 13 Barista's creation
- 14 Squirrel's find
- 15 Running bird
- 16 Bun
- 18 Tom Cruise
- 20 Mamie's mate
- 21 Mimic
- 23 Homer's neighbor
- 24 Spanish cat
- 26 Work units
- 28 Atlantic catch
- 29 Newborn's need

DOWN

- 1 Parking pro
- 2 Texas landmark
- 3 Crunch units
- 4 Tit for -
- 5 Applaud
- 6 Door feature
- 7 Lent effort
- 8 Coxswain's count
- 9 Gaspred for breath
- 11 Attacked
- 17 Count start
- 19 Gangster's gun
- 22 Work on a room
- 24 Boarded
- 25 Travel kit plug
- 27 Workout unit
- 28 Coyly mannered
- 30 Devoured
- 33 Half of Hispaniola
- 34 Bold poker bet
- 35 Prom group
- 37 Search out
- 38 Blunders
- 42 Crosses out

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YESTERDAY'S ANSWERS

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BEETLE BAILEY BY MORT WALKER

BABY BLUES BY KIRKMAN & SCOTT