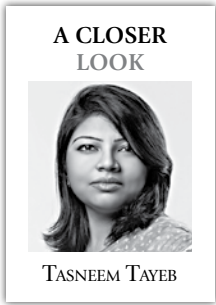


Who cares what happens to the children of Yemen!



A CLOSER LOOK

THE world today is grappling with an unprecedented crisis. More than 900,000 people have already fallen to the scythe of the grim reaper and more are feared to become its victim as winter approaches. Once an ominous refrain from the hit HBO series Game of Thrones, “Winter is coming”, it has now become a real fear, as world leaders are grappling to prepare their nations and people to fight Covid-19 during the winter, when it supposedly becomes more sinister and resilient.

The crisis for the people of Yemen, however, is on a different level altogether. People there—of all ages, but especially the children and the pregnant—are dying in scores, not only because of the super-spreading, apparently unstoppable virus, but also because of a very easily avoidable reason: hunger. Of course there are other factors as well.

Five years of war, worsening flood conditions exacerbated by the ripple effects of the war, locust threat, spiralling Covid-19 outbreak in the backdrop of the an already crumbling healthcare infrastructure, and most importantly dwindling aid, have made the situation worse for the people of Yemen.

The people there are starving, dying, and at times hoping to die in search of respite from the pain of constant pangs of hunger. There are expecting mothers whose children are dying at childbirth, there are parents whose plea for help, for support, for the survival of their young children are being turned down by helpless aid workers who are left with no aid. There are the sick who are slowly making their passage to the other world with no treatment. And then there are

those who are helplessly watching their children, parents, and families wither away in front of their very eyes, with nothing to do but pray for an afterlife that is less cruel.

Added to these woes is the unjustified suspension of essential US fund for Yemen by the Trump administration. The situation in Yemen is so dire that leaders of Oxfam America, the International Rescue Committee, the Norwegian Refugee Council, CARE, Save the Children and Mercy Corps, jointly said that, “The most significant challenge to sustained life-saving humanitarian action today is the severe shortfall in funding, which has been exacerbated by the US suspension.”

At this point, one might rightfully question the reason behind the US suspension of funds. The answer is simple: the Houthis have a history of levying tax on aid and blocking them from reaching the people in need. However, the scenario seems to have changed recently, with the USAID’s acting administrator, and the chiefs of some major aid groups working in Yemen, in a letter suggesting that in view of the “improved humanitarian access” in Houthi-controlled areas, US fund can be resumed. Adding that, “our ability to do so now is jeopardised unless the US changes course...Time is running out for tens of millions of Yemenis.”

But despite the pleas the US has not moved an inch from its headline stance against sending funds to Iranian-backed Houthi controlled territories where around 70 to 80 percent of Yemenis live. And while halting aid to the helpless Yemenis, the US keeps selling arms to the Saudis fuelling the destruction in Yemen. According to an ABC News report, “the State Department’s federal watchdog found the Trump administration had not done enough to minimise civilian casualties as the US provides arms, including precision-guided bombs, to the coalition led by Saudi Arabia.” And not just the US, the United Kingdom, France and Canada

have also contributed to the war in Yemen by selling arms to the Saudis. But time is running out for Yemenis. 50,000 children, many of them newborns, die in Yemen every year, as per data released by the Houthi-linked Ansar Allah movement in March this year. Saif al Hadri, spokesperson for the Ministry of Health in Sanaa, revealed to TRT Arabi that, “one child dies every ten minutes in Yemen”, adding that, “80 percent of children in Yemen live in

And as late as May this year, the United Nations warned that around 48,000 women might die of child-birth related complications, as it had to shut down 140 of the 180 facilities it used to run in Yemen due to shortage of fund, affecting some 320,000 women.

As the war continues to unleash havoc in Yemen, “medical and water infrastructure has been hit during air raids at an average of once every 10 days during the conflict—damage that

USD 1 billion of the required USD 3.2 billion has been received. And the days ahead look bleak.

While the Saudis—a major player in the five year long war that has torn the nation apart—has signed deals to provide an additional USD 200 million in aid to Yemen through the United Nations, the aid is as uncertain as it is farcical. For one, of the USD 500 million aid that Saudi had announced earlier this year for Yemen, the UN has so far received only a paltry USD 23 million as disclosed by the organisation to CNN. And one cannot deny that the Saudi-led blockade of Yemen has had catastrophic economic impacts on the nation in the first place. Of course, other nations are pledging funds. But would those funds be enough and even be delivered in time? That remains to be seen.

For now, as aid dwindles in the wake of the humanitarian crisis in Yemen, the world watches the spectre of famine, death and devastation unfold in front of their eyes with inertia. After all, this is happening so many miles away from our homes. Every country has its own problems to deal with, economic, societal, and of course, the Covid-19 outbreak that has stolen the limelight. So what that infants are dying, the unborn are dying, children are dying in another country. They are other’s children, children we have not seen, nursed or ever held. And there are so many of them in number that they are almost faceless, or perhaps they look identical: the same hollow eyes, the same ribs jutting out of the chest, the same bones sticking out of their shoulders. For the ones who are lucky, medical tubes are connected to their noses, or IV saline catheter pushed into their hands. For the unlucky ones, there is only one place to go: six feet under.

But so what? As long as our children are well fed and happy, who cares about what happens to the children of Yemen.

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A photo taken on March 18, 2018, shows a Yemeni child looking out at buildings that were damaged in an air strike in the southern Yemeni city of Ta'ez.

PHOTO: AFP

a state of stunting and anaemia due to malnutrition.”

According to Unicef, “the number of malnourished children could reach 2.4 million by the end of the year, almost half of all under-fives. An additional 30,000 children could develop life-threatening severe acute malnutrition over the next six months.” And children die, day after day, of hunger, of malnourishment and of related complication. Expecting mothers also die. On June 14, 2019, Unicef said that one woman and six newborn die every two hours in Yemen due to complications.

has not just killed civilians, but also disrupted access to healthcare, clean water and sanitation”, suggested Oxfam and the Yemen Data, as mentioned in the same report by ABC News.

In the midst of the chaos and confusion, the efforts to contain Covid-19 have also been hampered as “three quarantine centres have been hit by airstrikes” since mid-March, reported ABC News citing Civilian Impact Monitoring Project.

And aid keeps getting scarcer. The UN on September 23 said that aid to around 300 health centres in Yemen was being stopped due to lack of funds. So far only

What technological changes should the RMG sector embrace?

SUMAIYA NOOR

WHEN river starts running dry, start looking for water elsewhere. That’s what the global readymade garment (RMG) industry has been doing lately—reimagining apparel production line-ups and integrating technology for cutting cost and competition. Technological advancement and better efficiency are what the Bangladeshi RMG industry needs. This can be done with Artificial Intelligence (AI).

The RMG industry in Bangladesh is celebrated as its leading (and dominating) source of export earnings. Our position in the global market as the second-largest manufacturer of garments is an accolade that we wear proudly, and the industry has provided immense support to the economic development of the country.

AI, opposite to what is feared to be replacing people in the industry, can be used to embrace and create new opportunities. As far-fetched as it sounds, AI is a part of our daily lives: from Siri to Google search engine, to self-driving cars, customer service chat boxes and much more.

Bangladesh is becoming a more popular apparel sourcing destination for western retailers thanks to the ongoing US-China trade war. Geographical diversification of sourcing is underway, driven by the need for cost optimisation that predates the current tariff battles. Up to three-quarters of businesses said they were already looking for suppliers in new countries or had plans to do so in 2018 and some



of China’s long-standing competitors are emerging as their top choices. A notable portion of companies working in the cost-sensitive textile sector has mentioned plans to expand their sourcing to other Asian manufacturing hubs such as Bangladesh.

Brands in this modern-day market stay on the lookout for super vendors who have smaller lead times, shorter order runs, more styles and produce high fashion. In order to keep competing in this in-season change and highly competitive sector and hold their position, manufacturers in Bangladesh need to start embracing digital transformation and transform themselves into super vendors.

Bangladesh, according to an ILO report, has the lowest gender pay gap in the world. We have more than three million female garment workers who have graduated from abject poverty to

a position of economic empowerment. The report also refers to “impossible” targets being set for workers. In compliant factories, the targets are set by industrial engineers and workers often find them hard to accept. But with time, most factories can explain that there is a clear relationship between wage and efficiency. Bangladesh, limping at a national average of 40 percent efficiency has a long way to go compared with other factories in the world sporting an easy 70 percent mark.

When compared to 2016, there has been a 300 percent growth in investments in Artificial Intelligence capability in 2017 globally, as predicted by Forrester Research. An IDC research has predicted that the AI market will become worth more than USD 47 billion in 2020 growing from an USD 8 billion market in 2016. In

case of Bangladesh, re-branding and digitisation of the RMG industry to meet the global sourcing requirements will also require successful adoption on industry automation. For this purpose, specific cases must be reviewed with an objective yardstick.

Apparel retail, specifically, e-commerce, is driven by the fashions trending globally. AI can help computers identify images and recommend those products online which the customer is more likely to buy. E-commerce and M-commerce platforms, through AI capabilities, are able to leverage the information available about the customers and their inclinations, similarities and differences in the kinds of applications and products they seek.

AI intervention in merchandising can help companies to not just analyse large data volumes, but also predict consumer trends, making merchandising operation error free, and more aligned to the customer needs.

Apart from the capabilities discussed above, there is a sea of technologies that are already being offered by vendors like Amazon, Artificial solutions, Google, Creative virtual, Assist AI, etc. that apparel industry can use to improve its operating efficiency and gain cost advantages across the supply chain. Things like natural language generation, virtual agents, machine learning platforms, AI-optimised hardware, decision management, biometrics, robotic process automation and the list goes on.

An average order planning time

with manual systems is 35-40 minutes. Average order planning time with an automated system takes up to 7 minutes, giving vendors an 80 percent time reduction in order planning. With this improvement, if a factory produces 10 styles/day the lead time will be reduced by 5 hours in a day, 125 hours in a month and over 1,500 hours in a year. With the amount of time saved, more styles of clothing can be planned in a year with existing manpower. With order quantity shrinking per style and number of styles increasing, vendors can ensure that their costs don’t suffer.

In order to survive, vendors need to reduce lead time so that they can handle more style changes, cater to in-season change and reduce the cost to bid for more orders. Thus, the industry is ripe to be disrupted by digital transformation.

However, just like in a zero-sum game, what benefits business and industry, harms poor and marginal income groups. We will also have to take into consideration the possibilities of increased job loss and job replacement. Policymakers and industry practitioners will also have to adopt innovative measures to address these issues. In the competitive era of globalisation, the question is not whether or not we can sustain this position and adapt to the changing trends. The question is whether we are ready to embrace the technological change for a bigger gain.

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QUOTABLE Quote

AYN RAND
(1905-1982)
Russian-American writer and philosopher.

The question isn't who is going to let me; it's who is going to stop me.

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS

1 Ten topper

5 Fancy ties

11 First name in jazz

12 Mall units

13 Leave speechless

14 Report card signer

15 Adds

17 Road gunk

18 Allude

22 Attire

24 Field of film

25 Crew tool

26 Much of N. Amer.

27 Worries

30 Out of bed

32 Thoroughly

disgusted

33 Hill builder

34 Book parts

28 Chit

41 Diva's piece

42 "King of the Trumpet"

43 English county

44 Genetic copies

45 Advantage

DOWN

1 Witty remark

2 Choir voice

3 Tightly grouped

4 Dorothy's home

5 Nile reptiles

6 Flight units

7 Eye part

8 Vein makeup

9 Kayo count

10 Retired plane

16 Hosp. sections

19 Rattled

20 Different

21 Meg of movies

22 Remove

23 Quite uncommon

28 Fix, as a shirttail

29 Bubble shape

30 Drake's music

31 Consumption

35 Fine study

36 Flight site

37 Fill up

38 Comic Bernie

39 Maximum amount

40 Pi follower

WRITE FOR US. SEND US YOUR OPINION PIECES TO dsopinion@gmail.com.

YESTERDAY'S ANSWERS

G	A	G	S		M	A	J	O	R	S
L	E	V	I		A	T	O	N	A	L
L	E	V	I		C	O	L	O	N	Y
A	X	E			S	A	L	T		
			S	C	O	W	L	T	A	B
F	E	A	R	S		S	P	A	C	E
A	U	R	A			O	K	R	A	
C	R	I	M	P		Q	U	E	E	N
T	O	P		H	O	U	R	S		
			B	O	Z	O			A	B
M	I	L	A	N	O		I	D	E	A
A	R	I	S	E	N		D	I	L	L
R	E	D	E	Y	E		O	P	A	L

BEETLE BAILEY

BY MORT WALKER

WHY DO YOU GO OUT WITH BEETLE WHEN YOU COULD DATE ANY OFFICER IN THE CAMP?

UMM...YOU DON'T HAVE TO ANSWER THAT

BABY BLUES

BY KIRKMAN & SCOTT

GUH! GUH! GUH!

TATTLE! TATTLE! TATTLE!

OKAY, WHAT'S ALL THIS ABOUT?

I WAS JUST IMITATING MY KNUCKLE-DRAGGING BROTHER.

AND I'M BEING MY TATTLETALE SISTER!

HOW ARE THE KIDS TODAY?

NOT THEMSELVES.