

Readymade Garments Industry

Facing the Challenge

by Kazi Alauddin Ahmed

Subsequent to the year 2005, countries like Bangladesh enjoying now preferential treatment, would face stiffest competition in the readymade garments sector. Mexico's entry into the American market, it is apprehended, will pose a big challenge to Bangladesh and to contain such threat we have got to take adequate forehand measures immediately.

consideration paving the way for many others to follow. And thus began a long journey that is still on.

It is gathered from a competent source that there are about 3000 readymade garments factories in the country now. But, out of these 3000 we have 2400 units in actual production where as many as 10 lakh workers are employed. By now, the readymade garments sector has been the largest single area providing highest number of employment. Most interestingly, about 80 per cent of these workers comprise female ones.

The other major handicap, besides constraints of working capital and/or operational funds, has been inadequate backward linkage facilities within in the country. Invariably, most of the factories have to import fabrics and accessories from abroad to keep their wheels running. This naturally entails considerable expenditure in foreign exchange inflicting adverse impact on the profitability of the end products at the time of export. In recent times, however, a few installations within the country have been providing backward linkage support to some of the manufacturers of readymade garments. But their quality does still deserve improvement to meet the requirements of the importers abroad.

The readymade garments sector in Bangladesh has been subjected to intermittent international pressure over the past several years. One of these irritating assaults came from the United States of America in the early nineties on the issue of employment of child labour. The infamous Harkin's law initiated and adopted in the US Congress forbade export of Bangladesh products on grounds of engaging child labour in production. A state of

uncertainty seized the situation for quite some time but soon the prohibitory stigma was withdrawn upon our commitment to withdraw the child workers within a specified time limit. It was also agreed that the withdrawn child workers would be placed in specially organised schools to impart them basic education till such time they were over 14 and would be eligible for re-employment. A number of schools are now being run jointly by BGMEA and UNDP. The other assault came from the EEC countries on a superficial ground of quality which was poised with the threat of withdrawing the quota system the preferential treatment Bangladesh had been enjoying for long. The government, precisely the Ministry of Commerce and Industry took up the matter with the EEC and obtained a temporary settlement.

And at home the menace of political discord between the position and the opposition over the past two decades have had its dampening effects on the developmental activities. At the peak of every spell the national economy has invariably been the casualty. The sustained loss so far would be several thousand crores of taka. Our political leaders have never been less vocal in making 'solemn' pledge to laydown even their lives for the country. But when it comes to their being out of power their zeal for the nation recedes to the backyard and is replaced by a wily enthusiasm to regain power. This has been the traditional feature in our political system in which, in turn, continues to be costly to the national economy. The political instability, among others, have also affected the export tranche of the readymade garments sector which has been considered to be one of the few major thrust sectors for our export earnings.

The income from export of garments has been steadily on the increase. In 1991-92 financial year the total export volume comprised 59.31 per cent and the percentage of foreign exchange income was 26.71. And in 1992-93 financial year it was 60.64 and 27.80 per cent respectively. This ratio increased to 65.60 per cent in export volume in 1995-96 while

the foreign exchange earning for the same period stood at 32.30 per cent. It is observed from this statistical data that in the twin area of country's total export and foreign exchange income the contribution of the garments industry has been increasing every year.

The rapid growth of the readymade garments industry in Bangladesh and a few other developing countries has seen the remarkable shift of centre of production from Europe and North America to Asia which has spectacular corroboration in the massive employment opportunities. The rate of increase of employment in Bangladesh alone stands, as of now, at 416 per cent as against 597 in Malaysia, and 385 in Sri Lanka. In consequence whereof the rate of reduction in employment in Germany, Great Britain, France and the United States has been 58.55, 40 and 31 per cent respectively. On the other hand, the worst affected countries are Finland, Sweden and Norway where it stood respectively at 73, 65 and 64 per cent.

In the textile sector alone the developing countries occupy, as of now, 60 per cent of the total export trade where Asia's contribution is 35 per cent. This is likely to increase gradually due to a comparatively lesser cost of production till now owing to cheap labour. It is also true that subsequent to the year 2005, countries like Bangladesh enjoying now preferential treatment, would face stiffest competition in the readymade garments sector. Mexico's entry into the American market, it is apprehended, will pose a big challenge to Bangladesh and to contain such threat we have got to take adequate forehand measures immediately. From a recent survey it has been observed that by 2005 there will be a huge shortfall in the country of yarn, grey fabrics and finished fabrics. To offset such shortage would necessitate installation of a number of production units which would call for an additional investment of 12-15 thousand crores of taka. Since we shall not be able to make such a mammoth investment from our own resources we must have foreign collaboration. And unless we are able to ensure a congenial environment and an unfettered, stable political atmosphere foreign investments would not be forthcoming. The government appears to be very cautious about it and has already introduced a policy options providing easier terms for potential foreign investors. In this, the opposition political parties must play their expected role for the greater interest of the nation.

Intermediate Products Marketing System (IPMS)

An Approach for Exporting Jute Goods

by Dr A B M Abdullah

For successful implementation of IPMS primary requirements, we need to look for appropriate entrepreneurs who are already in the same or similar production or marketing lines in the developed countries. Embassies in foreign countries can arrange demonstration fairs of diversified jute products and attract entrepreneurs...

MARKETS of jute and jute products are declining both nationally and internationally. Markets in the developed countries for traditional products like gunny bags, carpet backing, hessian etc. are fast shrinking almost by 2.5 per cent annually. The reasons for this decline are more or less known to those involved in the marketing of jute and jute products. If such trend continues, a total loss of jute goods market in the developed countries is foreseeable. In fact most of Bangladesh's dealings with West Europe, Japan and USA, where traditional jute products are almost becoming obsolete. But with increasing awareness about environment, ecological effects and health-care, new generation jute products seem to have great marketing possibilities due to their environment-friendly properties.

Until recently various packaging materials were manufactured from jute, exploiting only one of its basic properties like visco-elastic property. But it has other properties as well such as biodegradability, photodegradability, drapability, nontoxicity, non-plasticity, less extensibility, hydrophilicity, an ionic, acidic and huge moisture absorbing capacity and availability of pure-cellulose. Until recently crystalline regions. Each of these properties can be utilized for the production of large number of textile, non-textile, woven, non-woven, composite, non-composite and chemical derivatives.

Jute has the unique characteristics of cotton and wood simultaneously due to the presence of cellulose and lignin. It needs only 120 days for growth in a humid, temperate, high precipitation weather with alluvial soil. Thus it is a quickly available and renewable source of fibrous biomass. All traditional jute products like twine, gunny bag, hessian, cotton bag, woolpack, twills, mats etc. were produced through mechanical conversion: carding, drawing, spinning, warping, weaving and finishing. But by chemical, biotechnological and a combination of mechanical and other processes, large number of horizontally oriented, vertically woven new generation of diversified jute products can be produced with various intrinsic and extrinsic properties which can fulfill some requirements of modern society. Technologies can be available for producing automobile car body, carbon fibre, composite materials of various types as a substitute of asbestos and glass-fibre, UV-protective materials, various synthetic fibres with natural and synthetic fibres for producing woven, nonwoven, netting materials for apparels, home textiles, geotextiles, medicare tex-

tiles, industrial textiles and pulp/paper made new products etc.

Bangladesh Jute Research Institute in collaboration with different organisations has produced a few new and diversified products, 'sutting' with jute/cotton blended fabric as an apparel being one of them. Recently I visited different component laboratories of the Institute of Textiles in France. During my discussions with the textile authorities of France, different aspects of jute properties along with their behaviour compared with synthetic and other natural fibres were discussed elaborately. Particularly environmental advantage of jute and jute products were discussed at length. Quality, design, motif, style along with various healthcare and safety requirements like fire retardancy, comfort, allergy resistance, UV-protection, quick disposal needs along with aesthetic needs of fashion were mentioned. This has made it difficult for under developed countries with outdated techniques to compete on equal terms.

On the other hand, this can be addressed simply by joint and collaborative production management system. Here final products which will be marketed, would be produced in a developed country but initial or preliminary processes are to be undertaken in an industry in Bangladesh. This process will be helpful to change the design, style, motif and quality of the goods according to need and the change in fashion. For example, in a developed country like France, there is a huge possibility of marketing of 'Jute Geotextile' as designed biodegradable, application oriented products. Here, primary processing will be done in an industry in Bangladesh and final products will be made according to the application, need, weather and environmental conditions of user countries. This PMS has advantages in marketing by quick change in fashion, design, colour trend according to demand. The 'jute-suit' can be made of jute-cotton blended fabric in 40:60 ratio. Its comfort and wearability are in the testing stage. One such suit

worn by me was tested and demonstrated in France where traditional European Summer with temperatures between 9°C-17°C prevailed between 1-10 June 1999. Comfort, warmth, colour change, dirt and stress absorption were observed. Similarly another one was worn by Dr Z Karim, Executive Chairman, BARC when he went on a visit to China and it won the approval of many. Comfort, portability, washability etc. depends mostly on the finishing of the product. During my discussion with French textile experts as regards the suit, they all responded positively and suggested a few techniques for its further development. They are of the opinion that as a summer dress in western Europe, it has great possibility.

During my study tour in France I also visited different component organisations of ITF in Paris, Lyon and Lille. In these places I discussed with scientists, technologists in laboratories, pilot-plants, workshops involved in various research activities on synthetic, natural fibres, composite textile materials. I witnessed up-to-date and modern testing and analytical methods and equipment where instantaneous and computerised results of internal and external properties of textiles are exposed on the screen, so solution of in-line production system can be prescribed quickly. Flax processing techniques to those of jute. Retting, fibre extraction, spinning and weaving are similar. I had detailed discussions about adapting flax wet spinning technique in the fine spinning of jute yarn.

I also visited ITMA Exhibition where high productivity spinning, weaving, netting machinery developed by French, Italian, German, Turkish, Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Spanish companies were demonstrated. Unfortunately none for jute was exhibited; all were for synthetic cotton and wool. Tremendous advancement in equipment and machinery development was achieved with minimum energy and water and in addressing environmental impacts.

Jute is a natural agricultural crop. Until recently it was used

only for packaging. But it has a wide range of properties as mentioned above that can be utilized for production of new and diversified products. But productivity, cost effectiveness and marketing are the most important considerations needing a divergent, farsighted, target-oriented planning. Knowledge, intelligence and commitment to market these products in a very fashionable way so that consumers are made aware about the production quality and its speciality. I have discussed a new method for marketing diversified jute products in developed countries and the main feature of this (IPMS) marketing technique is to involve foreign entrepreneurs in finished good production and marketing. Only initial processing would be undertaken locally according to the need to produce intermediate products. The following intermediate products can be identified for finding international marketing:

- i) Jute geotextiles: specific for filter, fibre drain, separator etc.
- ii) Jute blended products: apparels, furnishing fabrics, hometextiles, industrial textiles, artist's canvas etc.
- iii) Jute reinforced composites: car bodyparts, partition panels, eco-sound control etc.
- iv) Jute pulp/paper: currency paper, fibre reinforced paper, substitute to polybags, garbage bags etc.
- v) Wood substitute: doors, chair, table, furniture etc.
- vi) Medicare textiles: orthopedic bandage, napkins, sanitary towels, baby napkins etc.
- vii) UV-protective, umbrella, caps, hats, etc.
- viii) Carbon fibre: substitute for glass and asbestos.
- ix) Carpet/blanket: substitute for wooden, acrylic, cotton carpet/blanket with jute and jute blended ones.

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LETTER FROM EUROPE

Some Thoughts on Bullfighting

by Chaklader Mahbob-ul Alam

Bullfighting like fox, stag, and hare hunting usually arouses extreme passions. I have not found many people with lukewarm feelings about bullfighting. There are people who love it because they consider it as an art while there are others who hate it because they think that it is a cruel and ghastly sport. The supporters of bullfighting do not like their sport to be put on the same level as that of stag, hare and fox hunting because they consider these sports (which are performed by horsemen with a pack of hounds) as cruel and because there is no face to face confrontation between the man and the animal as it happens in bullfighting

equal match from the very beginning. In the final analysis, the bull does not stand a chance of winning the contest - in Spain, it does not leave the arena alive. (In Portugal, the wounded bull is killed in the slaughterhouse.) It is only fair to mention that most great matadors are gored several times in their lifetime and some of them also get killed in the arena.

The spectacle, which is full of pomp and pageantry (much like the Hollywood version of gladiator fights in ancient Rome), usually begins with a procession of three teams of bullfighters in their richly embroidered costumes (the matadors' suits have more gold embroidery because of their higher category) made of silk and satin entering the arena crammed with thousands of shouting and singing spectators. No doubt it is a festive occasion for them. A band plays the most popular Spanish march rhythm music (el pasodoble). Once the procession crosses the circle, two of the three teams which entered the arena before, leave it. The team remaining inside the arena takes up position for the entry of the bull, which, by the way, is a dangerously beautiful animal. The President of the ceremony, who is usually the top local government official of the area, throws down the key to the bull pens. This is the official signal for the bullfight to begin - which consists of four acts - the caping, the lancing, the planting of the darts and the kill.

As soon as the bull pen is opened, the bull usually charges

into the arena carrying the colours of the ranch (where it was bred) attached to its shoulder muscles. The matador, i.e. the head of the team starts the bull fight with caping (swinging the cape close to the horns) the bull with several passes called veronicas. This, in my opinion, is the most graceful part of the spectacle. At the end of this cape work, a bugle or a trumpet sounds and the picadors, mounted on horseback start their part of the work by wounding the bull with the lances. By this time it is a bloody spectacle - the bull is in pain and covered with its own blood. After two or three depending on the decision of the President of the ceremony) lancing, at the signal of trumpet sounds, the banderilleros on foot walk towards the charging bull and plant barbed sticks on its shoulders. By now, the bull has become weak, confused and irritated because of pain and loss of blood. Again a trumpet sounds and the matador approaches the bull for the final act. The matador taunts the bull and literally plays with it by making passes closer and closer to its horns. At the end of each pass, the spectators (by now completely aroused) stand up on their feet and shout "Ole", "Ole", in unison. The spectacle reaches its climax when at the end of these passes, the matador plunges the sword between the withers of the bull (the highest part of the back at the base of the neck). If the bull dies immediately, the matador is considered to have done a good job. If the animal has to be finished off later by a short dagger, he

loses points. This is definitely the most dangerous part of the show. At the same time it also demonstrates the courage, discipline and dexterity of the matador.

Depending on the performance, the matador and his assistants either receive the applause or boos from the spectators. If the matador performs well, the enthralled spectators acclaim the matador by shouting "Ole", "Ole" or "torero", "torero" and sometimes even throw bouquets of flowers in the arena. The President of the ceremony at his discretion, may award one ear, two ears or both the ears and the tail of the dead bull to the matador. The dead bull is dragged away outside, the arena is cleaned and made ready for the next bull to enter. In one afternoon, six bulls are usually killed - two per team.

Bullfighting as a profession, has functioned for centuries as an escape route for the ambitious rural poor from misery to fame, with all its glory (sometimes of death as well). If you are interested, you can hear these rags-to-riches stories anywhere in Spain. Although there have been several notable women bullfighters like Conchita Cortron and Maribel Atenzar, it is definitely a male preserve. Last woman matador of some repute, who tried to consolidate her position in this male-dominated spectacle was Christina Sanchez (now only in her twenties). She recently retired from the bullring by saying, "I have realised that many minds are closed and cannot accept someone breaking

bulls." Bullfighting like fox, stag, and hare hunting usually arouses extreme passions. I have not found many people with lukewarm feelings about bullfighting. There are people who love it because they consider it as an art while there are others who hate it because they think that it is a cruel and ghastly sport. The supporters of bullfighting do not like their sport to be put on the same level as that of stag, hare and fox hunting because they consider these sports (which are performed by horsemen with a pack of hounds) as cruel and because there is no face to face confrontation between the man and the animal as it happens in bullfighting

Dear reader, now it's your turn to decide whether you would like a spectacle like this or not. As far as I am concerned, I must confess, I do not have the stomach for such spectacles. By this I am not trying to underestimate the courage that is required to confront a bull. Allow me to mention an anecdote from my own life. As you know, I used to work for a large multinational corporation. You also know that these corporations usually organise an annual do in one of these countries where they operate to bring their executives from all over world and their respective spouses together, ostensibly to foster good relations among them but really to talk about their new products and lower the tax burden. Well, as it so happened, a few years ago, one of these conferences was organised in Marbella (southern Spain). In order to entertain the guests, the company rented a small bullring and hired a couple of professional entertainers, who also were amateur bullfighters. So far so good, nothing to complain. The extraordinary part began when one of the entertainers together with our Public Relations Manager started calling out names of the some of the spectators (all of them belonged to the company) to enter the arena to confront the bull. I actually it was not even a bull, just a calf weighing probably no more

than 150 kg). There were roars of laughter from the assembled crowd as one by one the unfortunate executives entered and left the arena completely dishevelled and shaken.

I was thoroughly enjoying the spectacle. The enjoyment stopped all of a sudden, when I heard my name being called out over the microphone. Fear grabbed hold of me. I refused to go to the arena. My friends kept chanting my name and I was literally pushed into the ring with a cape and a sword in my hands. I was so frightened that as soon as I saw the young cow coming towards me, I started running to one of the exit gates and in the process, I tripped over the edge of the cape and fell ignominiously on the sand. In my hasty retreat, I remembered the remarks of the female guest in Mowlanana's house many years ago and thought that I might look like a bullfighter but certainly did not act like one. Luckily, one of the professional entertainers came to my rescue and caped the animal away from me. A thunderous applause reverberated throughout the ring. A thousand voices for so it seemed to me) shouted "torero", "torero" in mock acclamation. It was evident that my friends and colleagues were having a good time at my expense.

Friendly Hug as Ploy to Steal Cellphones

A friendly hug was all it took for a gang of thieves to divert their victims' attention from their loot - cellular phones. But the Delhi police caught them eventually.

In spite their clever strategy, all three members of the gang are now in jail. The police claims to have solved 44 cases of cellular phone thefts in the city with their arrest and has recovered a total of 25 stolen handsets from them.

The thieves had a simple but effective modus operandi. They would strike at a wedding party

or a lavish get-together involving a large number of people. Dressed suitably for the occasion, the gang members would mingle with the guests in search of people with cellphones. Once identified, they would close in on their victims and employing a friendly hug as a form of greeting, would divert the unsuspecting victim's attention from his cellphone before disappearing into the crowd.

Police caught 18-year-old Mywill and 35-year-old Suresh Kumar red-handed in the Kotla Mubarakpur neighbourhood in south Delhi while they were at-

tempting to dispose of the stolen goods. Their interrogation revealed an accomplice, Shyam Lal, who was also arrested, police sources told the Hindu daily. Shyam Lal was reportedly the brain behind the thefts and planned the entire operation. He would purchase the stolen phones from Mywill and Suresh Kumar and sell them to his associates.

During police interrogation, both Mywill and Suresh Kumar confessed to their involvement in 44 cases of cellular phone thefts.

— India Abroad News Service

