



DHAKA, WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 12, 2011, E-MAIL: business@thedailystar.net

Automation answers dearth of skilled recruits

REFAYET ULLAH MIRDHA

THE number of workers was cut from 65 to 40 at a production line in Ananta Denim Technology, a Kanchpur-based denim jeans plant. It was possible because of the production system there was automated. The plant boasts a good number of such production lines.

The traditional production system, which was mostly manual, took more time and workers. It also meant the company had to pay more to make the system work, said Asif Zahir, a director of Ananta Group.

"But now, productivity in the plant has increased manifold and at the same time, the number of workers has been cut, which means I save on extra production costs."

The sector currently suffers a shortfall of 25 percent of skilled workers, he added.

With automation in place, the denim plant employing 1,500 workers can now deliver consignments on time and maintain the quality of the products, he said.

Zahir said it has also become easier to manage the 10,000 workers at Ananta Group because of automation.

The use of upgraded technologies in all spheres of production, or automation, has not only been adopted at the denim plant, but also in other units of the group to reduce costs and establish efficient management system, he said.

He said most work, like stitching, is now carried out by automated machinery within a shorter span of time.

"Definitely, we need automated production systems to



A computer-aided cutter at a Viyellatex plant in Gazipur.

grab the potential of producing value-added items. It means quality products from quality machinery."

Deploying the automated machinery, imported mainly from Germany, Italy and Turkey, the group that exported apparel items worth \$60 million in fiscal 2009-10 mainly to GAP, H and M, Next and Marks and Spencer, now looks forward to booking even bigger orders, Zahir said.

"On average, we produce 1.5 million pieces of trousers a month, of which, 60 percent is denim and the rest, non-denim products."

According to Zahir, there is a dearth of skilled workers who can operate the sophisticated machinery, but after proper training.

Similarly, productivity and efficiency improved remarkably at Viyellatex Group, a leading apparel manufacturing unit, following adoption of automated production systems, said Viyellatex Group Chairman David Hasanat.

Viyellatex Group was the Bangladesh's first garments factory that implemented the expensive Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) solution from SAP Germany, Hasanat said.

The group implemented ERP in its Gazipur factory in December 2009 at a cost of \$2 million, Hasanat added.

ERP is an integrated computer-based application used to manage internal and external resources, including tangible assets, financial resources, materials, and human resources, to facilitate the flow of information between all business functions inside the boundaries of the organisation and manage connectivity with outside stakeholders.

For example, a good number of workers are required in the cutting section, under a tradi-

tional production system, which is time-consuming too.

At an automated plant, it is possible to cut thousands of pieces at a time with modern machinery, which not only saves time, but also money and ensures quality, he said.

Industry insiders also agree that automation of the factories reduced the overall cost of production as majority processes are completed through using sophisticated machinery.

Automation ensures enhanced productivity, environmental protection for less water consumption and less

energy consumption and consistent quality.

Industry operators have also brought about changes in cutting, knitting, dyeing, finishing and packaging through the application of new technologies.

Similarly, in case of quality control, automated machinery can check whether any needle or any other metal tool is accidentally embedded in the packaged clothes in a very short period of time, according to workers.

Alan Renton, general manager (operations) of Crystal Martin (Bangladesh) Knitwear Ltd, a Gazipur based UK financed sweater factory, said it is possible to increase output at least fourfold in an automated production system compared with the traditional system.

"Automation means complex products at a competitive price," Renton said adding that he has already imported sophisticated machinery for his factory as he has a long-term vision in Bangladesh.

The company, which exported 3.5 million pieces of sweaters in 2010 to its only buyer Marks and Spencer, is eyeing export of 5 million pieces of sweaters next year.

For example, he said, China can produce more quality products in shorter periods of time only for automation of the factories.

In Bangladesh, the shortage of skilled manpower is a problem, although the manufacturers are overcoming the shortfall by imparting training by foreign experts, he added.

reefat@thedailystar.net

AMRAN HOSSAIN

At an automated plant, it is possible to cut thousands of pieces at a time with modern machinery, which not only saves time, but also money and ensures quality

Home textiles make a comeback

REFAYET ULLAH MIRDHA

THE export of home textiles is on the rebound with the western world making a recovery from the global financial recession.

Manufacturers are expecting hefty profits as orders from international buyers soared with the changed economic situation.

Recovery came with a bang when the sector earned \$296.01 million in July-December, registering a 77.75 percent growth from the same time last year.

The home textile export target fixed for fiscal 2010-11 is \$563.50 million. Earnings amounted to \$402.49 million in the year before.

Industry insiders said even in July of the current fiscal year, the export of the item witnessed a decline of 10 percent for an economic dip in the western world.

But in recent months, home textile exports surged, industry insiders said.

Nurul Afsar, company secretary to Noman Group, one of the largest home textile makers in Bangladesh, said demand for home textiles in the West increased significantly with recovery from recession.

"We are receiving plenty of

orders from international buyers. But, prices of the item are still low even after the prices of raw materials have gone up worldwide," Afsar said.

Noman Group exports goods worth more than \$15 million a month, but the profit

margin is narrow nowadays, Afsar said.

IKEA of Sweden, Heritage of Canada, Jionmax of Germany, Asda of UK and Carrefour of France are the group's major buyers, he said.

A senior official of IKEA said

the export of home textiles increased mainly because of an increase in the value and volume of products.

"The price of home textiles increased by 30-40 percent over the last few months because of a hike in the prices

of raw materials," he said, requesting anonymity.

Moreover, international buyers are shifting to Bangladesh from China and Pakistan, the two major destinations for home textiles, because of the price hike over high production

costs.

He said the devastating floods in Pakistan last year damaged the cotton crop as well as the industry. "As a result, buyers are shifting to Bangladesh to meet the growing demand for the item in the

western world," he added.

According to Bangladesh Textile Mills Association, more than 469.7 million metres of home textiles are now produced a year.

reefat@thedailystar.net



ZNZFB.COM