

DHAKA APPAREL SUMMIT



Fire safety equipment is displayed at an exposition that began yesterday as part of the three-day Dhaka Apparel Summit at Bangabandhu International Conference Centre in the capital.

POLASH KHAN

Fire safety fair generates great buzz

SARWAR A CHOWDHURY

Radwan Halabi was very busy describing the key features of his company's products to visitors, most of whom were textiles and clothing factory officials.

His company, NAFFCO, a UAE-based manufacturer of fire protection systems, was displaying various types of products and solutions, ranging from fire extinguishers to fire doors, at Bangabandhu International Conference Centre in Dhaka yesterday as part of Dhaka Apparel Summit, a three-day event.

Alliance, a platform of 26 retailers from North America, is organising the exposition on fire safety equipment on the sidelines of the summit, which is being arranged by the Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association.

The fire safety equipments get the top most priority after the fire incidents at Tazreen Fashions and Rana Plaza collapse that killed at least 1,250 workers.

"Already we have many clients in Bangladesh and plenty of people are showing their interest in our products and solutions," said Halabi, who is an export director at NAFFCO. The company has presence in 108 countries worldwide.

He said the price is not a factor; quality is the main factor and Bangladeshi garment owners now feel that "quality talks". Every product and solution should have proper certification such as UL certification, he said.

UL (Underwriters Laboratories) is a safety consulting and certification company headquartered in Northbrook, Illinois. It maintains offices in 46 countries.



Radwan Halabi

Halabi's company is also offering free installation service and training.

"Often it is seen that company officials install the equipment without having adequate knowledge on the installation and the

equipments do not work when fire incidents happen due to the wrong set up."

"We are competitive in quality," he said, referring the cheaper equipments of China and Malaysia.

NAFFCO is one of the 92 exhibitors from home and abroad that are participating in the exposition.

Symantec Technologies is a local company that imports different types of fire safety equipment from Italy, UK, Canada, US, India, Cyprus, Korea and Japan.

Apart from showcasing a wide range of products, the company is using the exhibition as a centre for meeting its existing and prospective clients.

The company will hold some 100 meetings with prospective clients at the exposition, said Md Monwarul Islam, executive

director of Symantec. "Our main purpose is to tell people about our solutions and services. If they like what they hear, we can seal the deal later on."

The company also provides installation and one year free maintenance service to its clients. "The wrong installation is a basic problem in our country, due to which the equipment do not work properly when called upon."

Referring a fire incident at Fakir Apparels about six months back, he said the factory had all equipment to fight fire, but they did not work timely due to wrong installation. The factory, subsequently, had to suffer losses of crores of taka, Islam said.

Officials and top executives of different garment factories were also crowding the stalls to choose fire safety equipment for their factories.

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Clean production methods key to scaling up exports

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Apparel makers must focus on cleaner production to attain the goal of reaching \$50 billion in exports by 2021, analysts said.

Adoption of cleaner technology will not only protect the environment but also enhance the factories' competitive edge, they said.

"Environmental initiatives are compulsory to enhance competitiveness," said Bastiaan Mohrmann, head of International Finance Corporation's water advisory team in South Asia.

He stressed the need for sustainable sources of clean water to double exports by 2021, as garment makers need a lot of water in the production process.

For every kilogram of textile produced, factories typically use 250 litres of water for washing, dyeing and finishing. "That's the daily water requirement of two people."

"If the environmental practices do not change by 2021, the sector's water demand will double. This is risky as the water level has been declining by at least 2 metres per year."

For every 20-metre drop in water level, the country spends about Tk 4,000 crore, or half a billion dollars, to pump water up from greater depths.

"This is a colossal amount -- greater than the entire 2014-15 budget allocated for social welfare."

Mohrmann's comments came at a session styled 'environmental sustainability -- a must' during the Dhaka Apparel Summit, currently being held at the Bangabandhu International Conference Centre in the city.

Atiur Rahman, governor of Bangladesh Bank, called upon the apparel makers to go green for

Adoption of cleaner technology will not only protect the environment but also enhance the factory's competitive edge: analysts

sustainable development of the sector.

Factory owners will get low-cost funds if they want to adopt environment-friendly technologies, he said, adding that BB has already developed 47 green products which come with lower interest rates.

He said there is no shortage of funds to adopt green technology. Factory owners can take loans from the Tk 200 crore green fund set up by BB.

Besides, they can also borrow from export

development funds at less than 3 percent interest rate.

John T Smith, long-term adviser of the United Nations Industrial Development Organisation, said many garment factory owners in Bangladesh are becoming more conscious of environmental issues due to their sustainable growth.

"It was a common practice to run effluent treatment plants only during inspections. But this practice has changed now."

Gerben De Jong, the ambassador of the Netherlands to Bangladesh, said the country's textile sector has improved significantly over the past several decades.

Now, they have to focus on cleaner technology for higher exports.

Lars Doemer, global sustainability manager of Lindex, a leading fashion chain in Europe, called upon the garment makers to follow the sustainable guidelines prepared by Lindex recently.

Elke Shrestha, GIZ's senior adviser for Environmental Standards and Resource Efficiency programme, called for more collaboration among the stakeholders for sustainable development of the garment industry.

David Hasanat, managing director of Viyellatex Group, also spoke.

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Project best practices to the world

Social and environmental compliance expert speaks on how to rebuild image of garment sector; compliant factories to be awarded tomorrow



Sarwat Ahmad

GAZI TOWHID AHMED

The garment sector should project its best practices to the world to rebuild its image as a compliant apparel maker, an expert said.

"We have the best practices in our factories in terms of social and environmental compliances. We should brand the country with good examples and we have hundreds of them," said Sarwat Ahmad, senior adviser of the Promotion of Social and Environmental Standards in the Industry, a GIZ project.

For instance, she cited the case of Yasin Knittex Industries, an export-oriented knitwear manufacturer which provides breast cancer treatment for its workers.

"This is a very good example that will strengthen the Bangladesh image globally," she told The Daily Star in an interview.

Another export-oriented knitwear manufacturer, Aboni Knitwear, distributes sanitary napkins to its female workers, who form the majority at the factory -- and in the sector. Of the 4.4 million garment workers, 80 percent are women, most of whom are migrants from rural areas.

Garment exports will triple by 2020 -- provided all factories become compliant in terms of social and environmental standards, she said, citing a forecast by McKinsey and Company.

In order to motivate all factories to adopt best practices and ultimately tap the export potential, the Promotion of Social and Environmental Standards in the Industry in collaboration with Bangladesh Brand Awards introduced the Social and Environmental Excellence Awards for the garment sector last year.

This year's winners will be announced on Tuesday at Dhaka Apparel Summit that kicked off yesterday.

The award will be given in four categories: social compliance, environmental performance, building and fire safety excellence, and inclusive skills development. The four categories have nine sub-categories. Inclusive skills development, a newly introduced category, will encourage factory owners to offer jobs to people with disabilities, Ahmad said.

This year, the award will emphasise worker safety concerns and their active participation in work and crisis management, rumour handling, productivity development and innovation, she said.

The sponsors of the award are: Institute for Sustainable Communities, a US-based organisation that works to reduce climate pollution; Worldwide Responsible Accredited Production, a US-based institution that works for apparel and footwear factories; and North American retailers' group Alliance.

The jury board comprises Shaheen Anam, executive director of Manusher Jonno Foundation; Farah Kabir, country director of ActionAid Bangladesh and representatives from the government, BGMEA and BKMEA.

The award will address the challenges with an approach of encouragement, Ahmad said.

It will also portray the connections between sustainable business practices and business results and create enthusiasm for faster adoption of best practices, she said.

"I hope that the award will encourage even more promising factories to follow and take up on these best practices showcased through our award," Ahmad said.

"It would be ideal if more factories start employing a more inclusive workforce and persons with disabilities as part of their mainstream workforce."



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Analysts take part in a discussion, Infrastructure -- the Road to Chittagong & Beyond, at Dhaka Apparel Summit at Bangabandhu International Conference Centre in the capital yesterday. Story on B1