

Robots of the future to take over apparel making

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Apparel factories in the future may see higher productivity with the introduction of robots in their production lines.

Atlanta-based SoftWear Automation Inc, a textile equipment manufacturer, plans to commercially launch automatic sewing machines and LOWRY -- a light-weight robot used in fabric handling, pick and place operations, and direct sewing -- by 2026.

The automatic sewing machines combine a patented thread vision system to fully automate the sewing process that will ensure both reliability and save time and costs for the apparel makers, the company said in a statement.

Currently, 4.4 million people work in garment factories in Bangladesh, 80 percent of whom are women who migrated from rural areas.

As the industry has matured in the last three and a half decades, garment makers have already reduced their dependency on workers through automation in sections of the production line.

As a result, a majority of the workers are now engaged in the sewing operations and commercial sections.

Entrepreneurs have also reduced the posts of helpers in the garment factories by introducing lean production systems, where sewing operators can also handle fabrics.

"Because of the exodus of sewn product manufacturing jobs to lower income countries decades ago, American manufacturers lack access to skilled seamstresses with the ability to produce high quality garments at affordable prices," SoftWear CEO KP Reddy said, as reported in the media.

"What's interesting about this problem is that India, Central America and China are now experiencing the same issue."

"Companies realise that if they can be closer to their customer, they can stop financing raw materials, win more busi-

ness, expand product lines and adapt quicker to what people want. Having the ability to produce at scale locally will allow garment manufacturers to quickly adapt to these market needs and compete more effectively," said Reddy.

"Human hands are extremely good at making clothes. While many manufacturing processes have been automated, stitching together garments remains a job for millions of people around the world," The Economist said in a report.

Factory conditions can be gruelling; as nations develop and wages rise, the trade moves on to the next cheapest location: from China, to Bangladesh and, now that it is opening up for Myanmar, according to the Economist.

Jack Plunkett of Plunkett Research, a market-research company, says pressure on Asian clothing manufacturers to keep wages low while improving working conditions is leading many to look at automation.

On that point, SoftWear Automation's Lockhart says a Bangladeshi company has already expressed interest in the firm's technology, the Economist added.

Anwar-ul-Alam Chowdhury Parvez, former President of Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association, said garment makers do not think robots are threats, as workers are the prime movers in the manufacturing process.

"We will need workers, even if robots can produce more. Customers like eco-friendly and environment friendly fashions. We need more workers for such fashion. The robots would not be able to produce those fashions," said Parvez.

Currently, about 30 percent of work in the production cycle is done through automation, and the rest 70 percent by workers, he said. If robots are introduced, automation might increase to 50 percent, he added.

The production by robots will be more expensive and the entrepreneurs would not be ready to invest heavily, he said.

Westin to mark Earth Hour tomorrow

STAR BUSINESS DESK

The Westin hotel in Dhaka, a Starwood concern, will join in the Earth Hour 2016 by turning the lights off for one hour tomorrow at 8:30 pm, to support environmental awareness and action against climate change.

The theme of the this year's Earth Hour celebration focuses on climate change following a successful conference of the United Nations in Paris, Westin said in a statement yesterday.

The annual global environmental awareness event was started by the World Wildlife Fund in 2007 to emphasise the threat of global warming and the need to reduce carbon emissions.

Westin is participating by switching the non-essential lights off during Earth Hour, encouraging guests to re-use towels and linens to save energy and creating awareness by informing guests about Earth Hour.

The Westin Dhaka will also host a candlelight dinner at Splash to celebrate the moment.

"It is a privilege for us to support such a powerful movement with such a simple gesture," said Dilip Madhok, general manager of Westin in Dhaka.

"Earth Hour reflects a philosophy we try to practice year-round that we all must do our part and together we can make a big difference. Climate change affects everyone and it also has an impact on the continued success of our business."

Last year, nearly 600 Starwood properties around the world took part in the event.

AirAsia India announces new CEO

REUTERS, New Delhi

Loss-making budget airline AirAsia India said on Thursday it had appointed a new chief executive officer as part of a management shake-up, as the carrier seeks to boost its small market share and turn a profit in a fiercely competitive aviation market.

The airline, part-owned by Malaysian carrier AirAsia Bhd and India's Tata Sons conglomerate, said in a statement that former American Express executive Amar Abrol will take over from Mittu Chandilya, stepping down at the end of this month after almost three years in the job.

Abrol was most recently the CEO of a financial products start-up and spent 19 years at American Express, AirAsia India said.

The airline, which has struggled to make money since it launched in mid-2014, also announced the appointment of former Air France KLM executive Ankur Khanna as chief financial officer, and Kiran Jain as its head of commercial operations.

The carrier competes with IndiGo, SpiceJet and GoAir in India's fast-growing air travel market, operating six aircraft covering 12 routes. Its market share stood at 2.3 percent in January, official data shows, ranking it sixth among India's airlines.

Last year it put domestic growth plans on hold as it waited for a government ruling on whether to change a measure regulating overseas flights.

Apple signs up for Google's cloud services

REUTERS

Apple Inc recently started using Google's cloud service even as it simultaneously builds its own data centers to reduce its reliance on third-party service providers, technology news website Re/code reported, citing sources familiar with the deal.

Apple currently also uses Amazon.com Inc's and Microsoft Corp's cloud services, but intends to end its reliance on all its rivals in the next few years, Re/code said.

The iPhone maker is spending between \$400 million and \$600 million on Google's cloud services, tech magazine CRN reported, adding that it was unclear if the range was for an annual rate or a set amount of capacity.

CRN said Apple has also significantly reduced its reliance on Amazon since signing up with Google late last year. Apple, Amazon and Alphabet Inc-owned Google could not be reached for comment outside regular U.S. business hours.

Apple said last February that it would spend a combined \$3.9 billion to build three data centers in Arizona, Ireland and Denmark. The Arizona facility is planned to be a command center to manage its other data centers.

GlaxoSmithKline chief executive to step down

BBC NEWS

GlaxoSmithKline chief executive Sir Andrew Witty is to retire from the pharmaceutical giant next year.

Sir Andrew has been with GSK for 32 years, having started as a management trainee.

He said: "By next year, I will have been CEO for nearly 10 years and I believe this will be the right time for a new leader to take over."

The company said the board would now begin a formal search for a replacement.

Like other pharmaceuticals companies, GSK has faced competition from cheaper generic drugs.

GSK's key measure of profits, core earnings per share, has declined in the last couple of years.

BTRC gives nod to Robi-Airtel merger

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At present, Airtel has about 800 employees, 470 of whom are permanent staff.

The new company will also not be allowed to cut any retailer or distributor of the individual companies after the merger.

The parent companies of Robi and Airtel signed the merger deal on January 28.

A senior executive officer of Robi said they are waiting for the commissioner's decision eagerly, as the merger will bring new investment into the telecom market.

New DMDs for NRB Commercial Bank

STAR BUSINESS DESK

Md Shafiet Wahed and Kazi Md Talha have been promoted to deputy managing directors of NRB Commercial Bank, the bank said in a statement.

Wahed started his career with Janata Bank and has since worked with Eastern Bank, Mutual Trust Bank and Mercantile Bank, according to the statement.

He completed his masters in finance from Dhaka University in 1989 and has taken part in training on sustainable finance from FMO,



Md Shafiet Wahed



Kazi Md Talha

Netherlands.

Talha began his career with Islami Bank Bangladesh, and later served Al-Arafah Islami Bank and

Standard Bank, the bank said in the statement. He completed masters in statistics from Chittagong University.

New president for garment packaging makers' body

STAR BUSINESS DESK

Md Abdul Kader Khan has been elected as the president of Bangladesh Garments Accessories and Packaging Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGAPMEA) for 2016 and 2017.

The election took place at the association's 25th annual general meeting on



Md Abdul Kader Khan

Saturday.

Taslimuddin Chowdhury, Moazzem Hossain Moti, Nazimuddin Chowdhury, Hasanul Karim Tamiz were also elected as first vice-president, second vice-president, vice-president and vice-president (finance) respectively, according to a statement yesterday.

Norway central bank cuts key rate to record low

AFP, Oslo

Norway's central bank on Thursday said it had cut its key interest rate by a quarter point to a record low 0.5 percent as growth and inflation were expected to shrink amid plunging oil prices and a weaker global economy.

Central bank governor Oystein Olsen suggested the rate could be reduced further "in the course of the year", possibly even into negative territory "should the Norwegian economy be exposed to new major shocks."

The bank predicted the Scandinavian country's oil-based economy would be further hit by "somewhat lower than expected" global growth, as "interest rates abroad have fallen".

"Growth prospects for the Norwegian

economy have weakened somewhat and inflation is expected to moderate further out," it said in a statement.

In a move unprecedented in its scale, the European Central Bank on March 10 slashed already record-low interest rates to zero, pumped massive new sums into the banking system and, for the first time, bought corporate bonds in a bid to jumpstart the stalled eurozone economy.

The US Federal Reserve meanwhile cut its outlook for the US economy and kept its interest rate policy unchanged Wednesday.

In Norway, mainland gross domestic product -- which excludes the strong cyclical variations in oil and gas production as well as shipping -- registered its lowest growth since 2009 last year, at 1.0 percent.

New governor vows to repair damage to Bangladesh Bank

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Panic has been prevailing among the officials concerned of the central bank over the incident.

CID INVESTIGATION

A team of US-based intelligence agency, Federal Bureau of Investigation, is due to meet today with the officials of Criminal Investigation Department, which is investigating the hacking incident.

Saiful Islam, deputy inspector general of CID and chief of the probe body, said they have already communicated with the Interpol and sought information regarding the investigation.

The CID yesterday discussed BB's security system with its officials.

The computer and the printer connected to the hacking as well as the server from which the messages were sent were seized by the CID.

Asked if the outgoing governor will also be interrogated, Islam said: "We will quiz him if needed."

GOVT FORMS SEARCH COMMITTEE

The government has formed a five-member search committee led by Palli Karma-Sahayak Foundation Chairman Qazi Kholiqzaman Ahmad to draft in a short list for the two vacant posts of deputy governors.

The other members of the committee include: Kabir, KAS Murshid, director general of the Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies; Zaid Bakht, chair-

man of Agrani Bank, and Gokul Chand Das, additional secretary of the banking division.

ALL LEADERS BLAST MUHITH

Ruling Awami League advisory council member Suranjit Sengupta yesterday blasted Muhith, saying he should also take responsibility for the cyber heist.

"We will have to take the issue seriously. No one is above suspicion -- and I am clearly mentioning that the finance minister and everyone of Bangladesh Bank."

"When you are holding a responsible position, you must speak out responsibly. You must mean it, you must take the responsibility. It's not a matter of fun; it's public money," he said at a programme at Dhakeshwari National Temple.

Sengupta, who resigned from his post as the railway minister in 2012 following the seizure of Tk 70 lakh from his assistant personal secretary's car, said if everyone in the financial department had acted responsibly, such incident could have been averted.

Meanwhile, Road Transport and Bridges Minister Obaidul Quader said the government is embarrassed by the cyber heist and stern action would be taken against the culprits.

"Bangladesh Bank Governor Atiur Rahman resigned showing his moral strength and courage. It is a rare case. He is not involved with the incident, but he can't avoid the responsibility," he said while visiting construction site of the Dhaka-Mymensingh four-lane project.



RADISSON BLU CHITTAGONG BAY VIEW

Geir Sikko, general manager of Radisson Blu Chittagong Bay View, and Lieutenant Colonel Ferdous Khan, secretary of Chittagong Club, sign an agreement on Wednesday. The two organisations will help each other during disasters or crisis like fire incidence, bomb threat, earthquake or any other natural calamity.

India flags off 2,200 tonnes of diesel to Bangladesh

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NRL and BPC agreed to form a joint venture to set up the Indo-Bangla Friendship Pipeline from NRL's Siliguri marketing terminal in West Bengal to BPC's Parbatipur petroleum product storage depot.

It will take a couple of years to install the pipeline, reported the Telegraph.

When completed, the pipeline will help reduce the carrying cost of petroleum products. As a result, the cost of diesel to be imported from India will be less than what suppliers currently charge Bangladesh, BPC officials said earlier.

Only five kilometres of the pipeline will be on the Indian side and the rest on the Bangladesh side.

Bangladesh last imported diesel from India through river routes in 2007, but the amount was small. The import of petro-

leum products through river routes was stopped later on.

But discussions are underway to resume diesel import by water vessels until the pipeline is installed, said a BPC official last April. This is the first time petroleum products from India will be brought through the railways.

Bangladesh now imports petroleum products from around 10 countries, currently importing around 3.5 million tonnes a year to meet local demand.

India's north-eastern region has excess refining capacity of petroleum products, offering New Delhi an opportunity to export to neighbouring countries such as Myanmar, Bangladesh and Nepal, according to the Telegraph.

Dhaka now imports about 500 megawatts of electricity from India and is set to add another 100MW this month.



BEXIMCO

Tshering Pem Wangchuck, queen mother of Bhutan, and Syed Naved Husain, group director and chief executive of Beximco, pose during a visit to the Beximco Group's industrial park in Sarabo of Kashimpur, Gazipur yesterday.



NOVOAIR

Officials of Novoair cut cakes at the launch of the company's flights on the Dhaka-Saidpur route yesterday.