


Apparel manufacturers are key to fashion’s climate ambitions

RMG NOTES



MOSTAFIZ UDDIN

LAST week, I wrote about the implications of COP26 on the RMG sector in Bangladesh. Since then, representatives from the fashion industry have made another major announcement at the climate conference, which could set off serious reverberations in the global fashion supply chains over the next decade.

A group of leading global fashion brands, including some of Bangladesh’s largest customers such as H&M and Inditex (owner of Zara), signed an updated commitment to the United Nations Fashion Industry Charter for Climate Action. The original fashion charter was signed at COP24, held in Katowice, Poland in 2018. At that time, signatories made commitments on decarbonising their supply chains, reducing dependence on coal-fuelled power in their supply chains, and directing their suppliers towards increasing the use of sustainable materials, including recycled textiles.

Anyone who thought that our buyers were not serious about this issue, will now need to think again. At COP26, all signatories made renewed commitments, including forming a decarbonisation plan aligned with the Paris Agreement ambitions to limit the global temperature rise to 1.5 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels.

Central to the new agreement was a call for the signatories to set science-based targets, or halve their emissions by 2030, with a pledge to achieve net zero emissions by no later than 2050. This is an update of the previous target

of 30 percent aggregate greenhouse gas (GHG) emission reduction by 2030.

Further commitments in the updated charter include sourcing 100 percent of electricity from renewable sources by 2030, the sourcing of environmentally friendly raw materials, and phasing out the use of coal from supply chains by 2030, among others.

I can remember COP24 like it was yesterday, and here we are, three years later, where the global fashion industry

fibres such as organic cotton, recycled polyester, etc. This call was made by the US-based non-profit Textile Exchange, and also included signatories from the fashion sector such as Gap, Primark, and VF Corp—all of whom source apparel products from Bangladesh.

Textile Exchange claims that these incentives are required because “cost is one of the key barriers faced by companies looking to shift their supply chain towards environmentally

to ask: Where are the fiscal incentives for suppliers? How can trade policies be used to incentivise and support suppliers in the greening of supply chains? How can investment in sustainability be made to make economic sense for suppliers?

This is a question I believe that we all need to give much thought to in the coming 12 months. It strikes me as odd that over the past five years, the fashion industry has made many commitments

Then what could fiscally incentivise suppliers to look at alternative sources of energy, to invest in new water-saving technology, and to examine how recycling options can be incorporated into production?

This is a broad question, and there are many ways of gently nudging the suppliers to go green. But how about, as a starting point, offering tax relief on supply chain investments which have a focus on sustainability? Surely, it is not beyond the imagination of the authorities to develop a list of investments that fall under this category?

But as fashion brands and retailers are making these pledges—which have implications for suppliers—perhaps there are some steps that they could take to support the suppliers along this path.

In the past, I have seen partnerships between the fashion industry and global entities such as the World Bank, designed to provide low interest rates for suppliers. To offer a specific example, a couple of years ago, the International Finance Corporation (IFC), a member of the World Bank Group, and US-based fashion giant Levi Strauss & Co signed an agreement to help the company to reduce GHG emissions and water use in its supply chain. The IFC worked with 42 Levi’s suppliers and mills in 10 countries to implement renewable energy and water-saving interventions to cut GHG emissions.

I don’t know what happened with this initiative, which included Bangladesh within its remit. What I do know, however, is that we will need more—a great many more—initiatives and partnerships like this one if suppliers are to help fashion meet some of the climate objectives laid down at COP26.

Fashion has thrown down the gauntlet at COP26 with its latest sustainability announcements. Suppliers are ready to work with their buyers to meet the challenge, but we can’t do it without the necessary support and access to finance.

It’s time to get to work.

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Fulfilling the renewed climate commitments by the global fashion industry at COP26 will be difficult without support and incentives.

FILE PHOTO: REUTERS

What could fiscally incentivise suppliers to look at alternative sources of energy, to invest in new water-saving technology, and to examine how recycling options can be incorporated into production?

is once again making commitments that will make business as usual a thing of the past in the coming decade, and which have fundamental implications for suppliers.

How do we respond? Well, it has been interesting to note that the past week has also seen calls by fashion retailers to provide fiscal incentives to encourage them to source sustainable

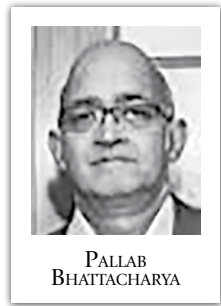
preferred materials.”

I would not argue for or against that, but what about suppliers? The signatories of the renewed fashion charter will be heavily dependent on their suppliers to invest in more sustainable manufacturing processes in order to meet their climate commitments.

In light of this, it seems reasonable

where the climate is concerned, but has not yet provided enough details about how these commitments will impact suppliers, what suppliers need to be doing for fashion retailers to achieve the goals, and where the funding and investment will come from to upgrade the supply chains. There are a lot of great ideas, but none of them has enough “meat on the bones.”

A billion Covid-19 jabs and India’s hope and caution



who termed it as a “triumph of Indian science and entrepreneurship.” The Archaeological Survey of India lit up 100 heritage monuments, including the Red Fort in Delhi, in colours of the national flag as a tribute to healthcare professionals, frontline workers, scientists, vaccine manufacturers and the citizens of the country who bravely fought the pandemic.

According to official data, over 75 percent of India’s 940 million eligible adult population received at least one dose of a Covid vaccine, while around 31 percent received both the

remotest areas to vaccinate people.

At present, the Covid situation on the ground appears to be good, with fresh daily rise of the disease dipping to the lowest since March, and with no report of a mutation of the virus or emergence of a new variant in genome sequencing done till the middle of October. Public health experts say that though new cases and breakthrough cases for fully vaccinated would continue to occur, they are likely to be less virulent.

The daily rise in new infections has been below 20,000 for several weeks, reflecting the sustained downward trajectory of the disease. According to official data, the average daily doses administered in a month has gone up from 1.969 million in May to 3.989 million in June, 4.341 million in July and 5.929 million in August. The average daily vaccination in September was 7.869 million, while it was 6.256 million per day in the first week of October. September 17 was a red-letter day in the Covid immunisation campaign when, marking Modi’s 71st birthday, 25 million jabs were administered across India.

Supreme Court.

However, celebrations around administering one billion vaccine doses does not hide a possible red flag: the discrepancy between the number of fully vaccinated individuals and those with just one shot, which gives an estimated 30 to 50 percent protection against the virus. Only around 20 percent of the country’s 1.4 billion people have received both the doses. The government has acknowledged that a “sizeable number of eligible beneficiaries” have not taken their second dose, but it has declined to share the numbers. The disparity between the partially and fully vaccinated in India is among the highest in the world, and of concern to a country that has already reported over 450,000 deaths.

The government is aware of this problem and has called on states and UTs to focus on administering the second doses, and advised them to frame strategies to close the gap. On November 3, Prime Minister Modi cautioned against complacency in Covid vaccination drive, particularly in 40 laggard districts spread across six states, and called for a door-to-door drive in those areas.

in rural areas. Experts are of the view that vaccination should be done door-to-door in those areas where a wage-earner cannot afford to go without even a day’s work. Many of them may still be harbouring vaccine hesitancy. But there is no time for such hesitancy now when India is sitting on piles of vaccine doses.

There is also an external dimension to India’s ramped-up vaccine production since August. Modi’s “vaccine maitri” diplomacy, though halted by the deadly second wave of the pandemic in March-April, has positioned India as a key player in meeting global needs, particularly of middle-income and poorer countries in Asia, Africa and Latin America. After restarting the vaccine exports of Covid-19 vaccines in October with four million doses, India is expected to increase it in the coming months as domestic stocks build up and most of its own large population is vaccinated either partially or fully.

The Serum Institute of India,

manufacturing the Oxford-AstraZeneca vaccine, and Bharat Biotech are ready to further increase their production capacities, and with a few other locally-developed vaccines closer to production or clearing national regulatory approvals, India is expected to be producing 300-320 million shots a month by early next year—more than the average 210 million doses it administers at home per month. The vaccine export policy is not cast in stone.

Flexibility is the buzzword of such a policy, keeping in mind the domestic requirement first. If national interests during the peak of the second wave warranted India to give overriding priority to meet domestic needs, the changed situation today should give equal focus to global collaboration. The World Health Organization (WHO) approval to Covaxin, India’s indigenous Covid-19 jab, is expected to help that objective.

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Health officials administer the first dose of Covishield Covid-19 vaccine to two adults at a vaccination centre in Mumbai, India, on May 3, 2021.

FILE PHOTO: REUTERS

doses, as of October 2021. This is by no means a small achievement, given the logistical complexity of administering one billion doses in less than a year, in a country as vast and diverse as India. The only other country to have administered one billion doses is China, who raced to the milestone in June.

Given the unpredictable nature of the coronavirus, the scale and intensity of the pandemic as well as the challenges surrounding manufacturing, distribution and delivery of vaccines undoubtedly represents a significant effort on the government’s part. Over the last several months, healthcare workers worked round-the-clock to accelerate vaccination coverage in every part of the country. Many travelled across difficult terrains and to the

The main idea behind ramping up the vaccination drive, backed up by a significant increase in vaccine supplies, was the festival season in October and November (Durga Puja and Diwali) so that more and more people would get at least one dose. The pace slackened due to the festivals as the country soaked in the festive spirit in October-November.

India’s Covid immunisation exercise gathered pace after a policy reversal in which the federal government wrested back the control of vaccination from the authorities in opposition-ruled states in June, and also announced free jabs for all above the age of 18 years, ending weeks of almost daily blame-game over price and procurement of the vaccines. This policy change was forced largely by the

Public health experts in and outside the government are keeping their fingers crossed largely due to the three months of October, November and December, when Durga Puja, Diwali, Christmas and New Year festivals are on. Many medical experts warn of a rise in Covid cases if crowd management is not done properly and Covid protocols are not abided by during festivals. Secondly, there are areas of concern in states like West Bengal, Tamil Nadu, Telangana, Odisha and Andhra Pradesh where new cases are either plateauing or dropping very slowly.

One of the major challenges of attaining the objective of fully inoculating every adult by the year-end is the 12-week gap between the two doses of Covishield, which extends even farther in the event of a person getting infected after the first dose. The government has to take a call on how to bridge the gap between the two doses.

Another challenge will be the vaccination of children, particularly those having comorbidities. India’s first vaccine for children has been given emergency use authorisation (EUA), and the government is likely to frame the final guidelines and set a timeline of the vaccine roll-out for children. This assumes significance as schools and colleges have reopened or are resuming physical classes in phases in many states.

Secondly, India’s drug sector regulator recently gave EUA to Bharat Biotech’s vaccine Covaxin for children between two years and 18 years of age. The government has to tread cautiously here, because no other country is administering the Covid jab to children aged between two and six years. Although the safety and immunogenicity of Covaxin have been found to be the same among adults and children, it may be quite a task to convince parents to allow their children to get vaccinated.

Another thrust area should be to jab adults

Government of the People’s Republic of Bangladesh

Directorate of Primary Education

Office of the District Primary Education

District: Thakurgaon

www.dpe.thakurgaon.gov.bd

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Date: 03-11-2021

e-Tender Notice-02/2021-22

e-Tender is invited in the National e-GP System Portal (<http://www.eprocure.gov.bd>) for the procurement below:

Sl No.	Name of work	Package No.	Tender ID No.	Last selling date & time	Closing date & time	Opening date & time
01	Furniture supply for 70 Nos. Class Room and 13 Nos. Teachers Room of selected 19 Nos. of Newly Nationalized Govt. Primary School at different location of Thakurgaon District.	e-Tender NBIDNNGPSP 1/Tha/2019-20 G1-01	613424	05-Dec-2021 15:00	06-Dec-2021 15:00	06-Dec-2021 15:00

This is an online tender, where only e-Tender will be accepted in the National e-GP Portal and no offline/hard copies will be accepted. To submit e-Tender registration in the National e-GP System Portal (<http://www.eprocure.gov.bd>) is required. The fees for downloading the e-Tender documents from the National e-GP System Portal have to be deposited online through any registered banks' branches up to 06-Dec-2021, 15:00. Further information and guidelines are available in the National e-GP System Portal and e-GP help desk (helpdesk@eprocure.gov.bd).

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