

Price wars to premium shoes



At Bata Bangladesh, our purpose goes beyond making shoes. It's about creating value for customers, employees, and communities, while building a sustainable future. Despite macroeconomic challenges, we are confident in our ability to deliver innovation, quality, and affordability, walking together with our customers, growing together with the nation.

Debabrata Mukherjee
Managing Director
Bata Bangladesh

Bata Bangladesh is part of the Bata Group, which operates in over 75 countries globally and has been part of Bangladesh over 60 years. We find out what's next.

The Daily Star (TDS): How would you describe the current state of the Bangladesh market for footwear?

Debabrata Mukherjee (DM): Bangladesh remains one of the most dynamic footwear markets in South Asia. The long-term fundamentals are extremely strong, driven by rising urbanisation, a growing middle class, and an increasingly fashion-conscious consumer base. We are observing a steady consumer shift from unorganised, purely price-driven alternatives toward trusted brands that deliver both durability and style.

TDS: What major trends or consumer shifts have you noticed in the last five years?

DM: Over the past five years, a trend towards premiumisation has emerged. Customers are willing to invest in comfort-enhanced and health-conscious footwear featuring antimicrobial and lightweight properties. The youth market demands trend-led designs at accessible prices. This shift in consumer preference is coupled with the growing adoption of omni-channel shopping, as customers now seamlessly move between in-store, online, and hybrid purchasing models.

TDS: What are the biggest challenges and opportunities right now?

DM: To us, every challenge is an opportunity. The challenges that we are facing now, higher import costs exacerbated by the exchange rate volatility, unstable inflation, etc, are

creating significant opportunities for us to revamp our operations and become more agile. We are strengthening our local sourcing and supply chain capabilities by working closely with our local partners in product and material upgradation and process re-engineering. We are also adapting quickly to rapid advancement in Technology. During the Sneaker Fest in our stores last year, we introduced an Augmented Reality try-on experience, which was very well received by young, tech-savvy consumers.

TDS: How is your product made according to our weather?

DM: In our weather, humidity is a key factor. At Bata, we've invested in advanced adhesives, improved bonding technologies, and rigorous wear-testing to ensure durability in such conditions. Our new Floatz and Comfit ranges, designed with lightweight yet sturdy materials, are particularly suited to the local climate. We also continuously adapt global innovations to address local weather realities, ensuring our customers enjoy footwear that lasts.

TDS: Which line of shoes is popular in your brand among different customer segments?

DM: Bubblegummers offer colourful, washable, and antibacterial protection for children, while Power and North Star provide trendy sneakers for an active youth lifestyle. For professionals, Comfit delivers unmatched all-day comfort with features like soft cushioning and a flexible, slip-resistant sole. Floatz caters to families with its lightweight, versatile, and durable design.



Turning leather into lasting growth

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The industry supports many families. Recent government and sector reviews estimate employment at roughly 8 to 10 lakh people linked to leather and footwear work.

The sector's gains face clear obstacles. Waste treatment and environmental compliance are a major hurdle. The Central Effluent Treatment Plant (CETP), at the Savar tannery estate has struggled

to operate at the required standard. When the CETP is underperforming, tanneries cannot meet buyers' environmental checks. That limits access to higher-value orders.

Other problems include a thin domestic supply chain for synthetic materials, slow customs procedures, and a shortage of trained technicians for modern production lines. Small factories find it hard to raise funds for upgrades. These bottlenecks

raise costs and slow deliveries.

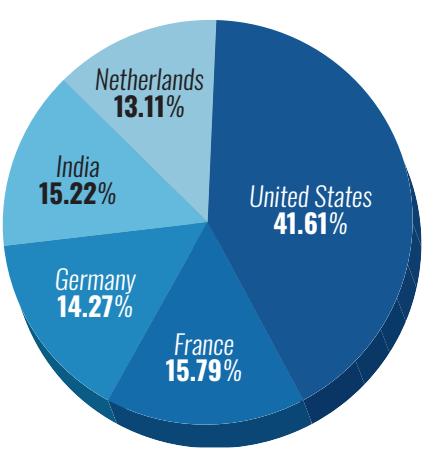
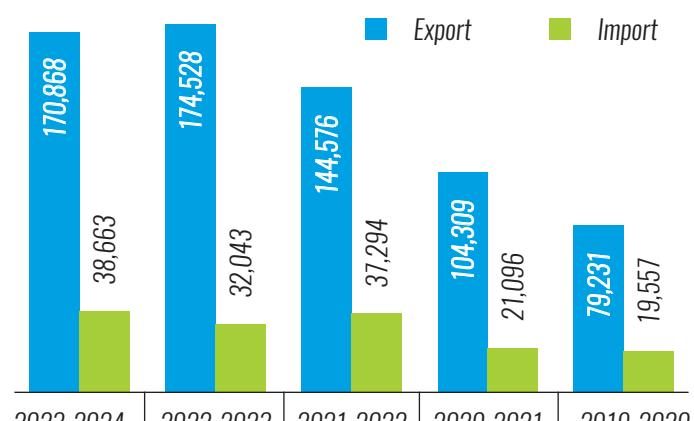
The bright spot again
Footwear is the engine now. Buyers are ordering more from Bangladesh, with non-leather exports set to cross half a billion dollars this year. Investments in modern machines and design have paid off. Factories now produce better styles, while small workshops meet buyer standards. New orders create steady jobs for cutters, stitchers,

Priority policy steps

- United States ■ France ■ India ■ Germany ■ Netherlands
- 1. Make Savar CETP reliable: approve and back private effluent plants
- 2. Provide short practical training plus low-cost loans for waste upgrades
- 3. Simplify customs rules and incentivise local input suppliers

SOURCE: EXPORT PROMOTION BUREAU (EPB)

FOOTWEAR EXPORTS VS IMPORTS FOR THE LAST FIVE YEARS



SOURCE: BBS

and packers. Higher quality brings higher prices and repeat business, and the gains could spread further with stronger support for training, credit, and market access.

What LWG means and where it falls short

The Leather Working Group (LWG) is a not-for-profit group that audits tanneries. LWG checks water use, energy use, chemical safety and wastewater treatment. Tanners get ratings when they meet these checks. LWG-certified hides and leather are easier to sell to big buyers.

But many Bangladeshi tanneries are not LWG certified. The main reason is the CETP problem and weak technical records. Certification needs good waste treatment and consistent documentation. Smaller units struggle to meet both. The certification gap keeps some buyers

away. Reports also show social risks in parts of the supply chain. Investigations find vulnerable workers in small workshops. These issues raise reputational risk for the sector and for buyers. Therefore, tackling the certification gap will reduce those risks and help the industry sell more furnished leather.

Practical steps government and industry can take

A dependable CETP at Savar would allow more tanneries to meet environmental checks and win back buyer confidence. Private effluent plants can share the load, reducing delays and keeping orders flowing. With waste management in place, factories can focus on audits like those by the Leather Working Group (LWG), which assess water use, chemical safety and treatment.

Government support—short training, low-cost loans, and phased incentives—would help smaller units upgrade and move toward certification. Compliance then becomes not just a burden, but a selling point.

Stronger treatment and certification will also deepen the supply chain, support footwear clusters, and encourage local suppliers of synthetic materials. Faster customs and simpler warehouse rules can further cut lead times. Together, reliable treatment, better suppliers, and timely deliveries create the conditions for larger orders, higher quality, and steady growth.

With this joined-up approach, Bangladesh can turn potential into higher-value exports, reliable jobs, and stronger earnings.

Reliability meets modern style



There has been a strong rise in fashion consciousness, especially among the youth. Price is no longer the only deciding factor; design and lifestyle compatibility matter greatly.

Secondly, women are shaping the market more than ever before. With higher workforce participation and mobility their demand for both comfort and style has grown significantly.

Syed Nasim Manzur
Managing Director
Apex Footwear Limited

Apex Footwear Limited has spent more than three decades shaping the way Bangladesh wears its shoes. What began in 1990 as a leather export venture has since grown into a powerhouse brand, catering to international buyers while building one of the country's largest retail footprints.

The Daily Star (TDS): How would you describe the current state of the Bangladesh footwear market?

Syed Nasim Manzur (SNM): The market is vibrant and at an inflection point: strong domestic demand driven by youth, rising incomes and fashion awareness, and a growing role as a sourcing hub for global retailers. Consumers are increasingly demanding quality, comfort, and design.

TDS: What major trends or consumer shifts have you noticed in the last five years?

SNM: Fashion consciousness has surged, women's demand has risen with higher workforce participation, e-commerce has become mainstream, and there are early moves toward sustainability and premiumisation.

TDS: Where does your company stand in terms of market share in the industry?

SNM: The market totals around BDT 12,000 crore (structured = BDT 4,000

crore; unstructured = BDT 8,000 crore). Apex reported structured sales of BDT 987 crore and unstructured sales of BDT 238 crore (total BDT 1,225 crore). This is roughly 10% of the full market and about 25% of the structured segment. Apex competes across price tiers with emphasis on reliable quality, accessible pricing, expanding product diversity and digital adoption.

TDS: What are the biggest challenges and opportunities right now?

SNM: Challenges include rising import costs for raw materials, currency volatility, inflation and the need to accelerate technology adoption. Opportunities arise from a young urban consumer base, increased regional and global buyer interest, and returns from investment in skills, design, sustainability and compliance.

TDS: After long storage, some customers report sole or glue separation of their shoes. What causes this issue?

SNM: Separation commonly stems from prolonged storage without flexing, humid conditions and heat or moisture exposure that weaken adhesives. Apex is responding with stronger adhesives, enhanced quality checks, clearer consumer storage guidance, and strengthened after-sales service and warranty policies to protect brand trust.



LOTTO
ITALY

TECHNOLOGY IN
Every
STEP

