Panos Mytaros

Bata to make quality shoes affordable for all

Group CEO Panos Mytaros says in an interview

AHSAN HABIB

Shoemaker Bata is strengthening its presence in Bangladesh, promising to "democratise" footwear by making quality, design and comfort accessible to all, not just a narrow segment of buyers, according to the group CEO.

In his first visit to the country as the chief executive of Bata Group, Panos Mytaros said he gathered fresh insights into a market shaped by tradition, changing tastes and rising expectations.

In an interview with The Daily Star, Mytaros said he wants to modernise the brand by blending global design trends with local preferences, especially around celebrations, while ensuring high standards remain affordable across income groups.

"I find the Bangladeshi consumers very traditional. For them, celebrations matter a lot, and buying patterns increase during those times," he said.

At the same time, he observed a clear shift in consumer behaviour. "The consumer wants quality and is ready to pay an affordable price for quality. It is not just a price-sensitive consumer base, which is very interesting," he said. "They also want a specific taste and variety."

Bata has been running its business in Bangladesh since 1962, and enjoys strong brand recognition. But Mytaros said that legacy alone will not secure its future.

"Consumers know Bata. We do not need to prove Bata to the consumer," he said. "But that gives us a very big responsibility to continuously attract new consumers and be relevant."

That relevance, he said, depends on adapting to modern expectations without losing sight of tradition. "The Bangladesh market needs more variety. It needs design which fits, and this is what Bata has to do and will do."

Drawing on his global experience, Mytaros described Bata as a "unique" brand for its deep local roots.

"Bata is considered local in many countries because it has been there for many years. It is part of the culture," he said. "It is not somebody selling shoes."

That identity shapes the company's strategy. "Bata cannot be just a global company which makes a global collection and ships it to a market," he said. "It needs to be with the market and at the same time be global."

Central to that approach is what he called an "unreasonably good" product proposition, which explains why a customer should choose your product, specific benefits, solutions to pain points, and competitive advantages.

"We are a very big company that operates in a highly decentralised way. It worked for many years, but it created complications," said the CEO.

Simplification, he added, is essential. "If we offer too many things, we confuse the consumer," he said. "Simplification starts with the product and the message."

In Bangladesh, the company plans to focus on two core categories: leather shoes and sneakers. "Be very clear -- these are our sneakers, these are our shoes, and tell the consumer why you buy Bata," he said.

For the focus on sneakers, Mytaros pointed to the rapid rise of casual footwear worldwide.

"Sneakers are a very big trend and have changed the shoe world in the past decade," he said. "It is not just a choice anymore; it is part of consumers' lives."

Bata plans to sharpen its sneaker offer while keeping it inclusive. "You will see much more clarity, much more relevance, especially with younger audiences. But not only for them, for everyone," he said.

Mytaros said he sees Bangladesh playing a larger part in the group's global strategy, both as a market and a production base.

"I see a lot of design inspiration coming from Bangladesh influencing Bata," he said. "And definitely, more manufacturing and exporting shoes from Bangladesh to other Bata countries."

With a population of around 180 million and a fast-developing economy, Mytaros said he believes the country can become a key growth driver for the group.

On the expansion plan, the CEO said the company is preparing to expand both retail and manufacturing operations in Bangladesh.

"We need to get more Bata shoes onto people's feet," he said. "Many consumers do not relate to Bata today. We need to get them back."

He said that growth will come through new stores, franchise partnerships and higher production capacity. "We have plans to expand retail, expand with partners and expand manufacturing, for Bangladesh and for export," he said. "So yes, general expansion."

Summing up his approach, he said, "Our mission is simple. Make great shoes that everyone can afford, not just a few."

Bata Shoe Company Bangladesh Ltd reported sales of Tk 700 crore in the first nine months of 2025, up from Tk 696 crore in the same period a year earlier. In 2024, the listed multinational declared a 445 percent cash dividend for shareholders.

The company, listed on the Dhaka Stock Exchange in 1985, saw its shares trade at Tk 831 yesterday.

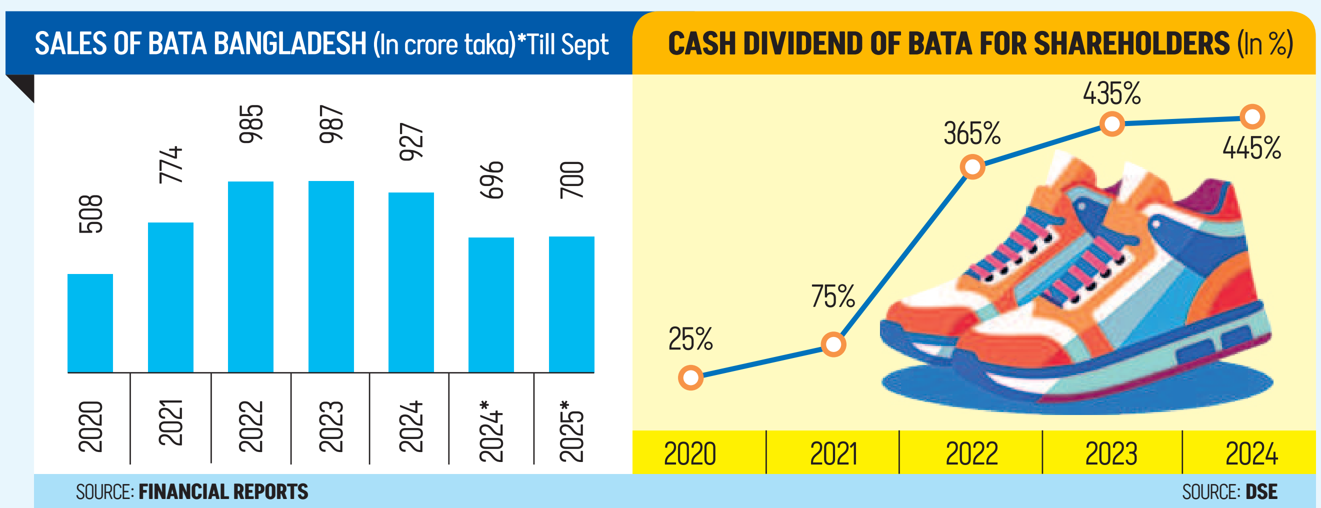
"The consumer has to touch and say, 'This is so good,' but it is actually unreasonable economically," he said. "There is this perception that quality and premiumness cost more, and this is something Bata has to make available for everyone."

At this point, the idea of democratisation runs through the company's plans.

"I call it democratise quality, democratise design, democratise comfort," he said. "This is actually very fundamental in Bata's history."

He said the goal is to serve all segments of society. "We will make sneakers that are comfortable and designed for everyone. Not for the elite or only one part of the demographic," he said. "At the end of the day, it is the same ritual we had many years ago, but modernised."

Alongside product changes, Bata is restructuring its business model to reduce complexity while keeping local responsiveness.



Think later, punish now

MAHTAB UDDIN AHMED

One evening in Dhaka, a man shouted "chor, chor" and "dhor, dhor", and within seconds a crowd appeared with the efficiency of a flash sale. Nobody knew what had been stolen, by whom, or whether anything had been stolen at all. But Bangladeshis do have a special talent: give us half a rumour, one injured sentiment and a roadside audience, and we can produce a full moral verdict before the police have found their sandals. We may be the only people who can turn confusion into confidence so quickly. That, in essence, is mob culture. It begins where trust in institutions ends. When people stop believing the police will act, the courts will move, or justice will arrive before retirement, they begin to treat instant outrage as a valid legal procedure. Add social media, political tribalism, religious provocation and our national addiction to public drama, and the mob becomes an institution of its own. Cheap, fast, emotional and tragically popular.

The consequences are no joke. Ain o Salish Kendra (ASK) recorded at least 197 deaths in mob attacks in Bangladesh in 2025, up from 128 in 2024. Netra News, analysing ASK data, found 228 deaths across 2023 and 2025 classified as potential mob violence, of which 176 appeared to involve either spontaneous mob attacks or killings later framed that way.

Here is the uncomfortable part: this culture does not remain on the street. It enters the office wearing a tie.

In corporate life, mobs do not carry bamboo sticks. They carry forward emails, selective leaks, meeting-room silence and whispered consensus. The target is not beaten in public but slowly stripped of credibility. One person is labelled "difficult", "negative", "not aligned" or, the evergreen classic, "not a team player". Then the crowd takes over. The allegation becomes evidence simply because enough people repeat it. The International Labour Organization (ILO) describes mobbing, or workplace bullying, as a situation in which an employee or group of employees becomes the target of persistent, systematic and prolonged negative actions by superiors or colleagues, leaving the victim feeling vulnerable and helpless. Another ILO publication defines bullying as repetitive or systematic negative and insulting behaviour directed at a worker.

So yes, the corporate version of mob justice is real. It is simply better dressed. This is not a peripheral problem. A joint survey by the ILO, the Lloyd's Register Foundation and Gallup found that almost 23 percent of people in employment globally have experienced violence and harassment at work. A 2024 survey by the Workplace Bullying Institute found 32 percent of adults in the United States reported being directly bullied, while 72 percent said they were aware of workplace bullying. We have upgraded from mob justice to spectator justice. In Bagerhat, a dog was dragged away by a crocodile while people watched. Nobody needed to throw a punch. Indifference did the job. We are becoming a society that can turn even helpless suffering into live content.

Why does this mindset thrive? Because mobs offer three emotional rewards: speed, belonging and impunity. You do not need evidence, only energy. You do not need courage, only company. And you do not need accountability, because guilt becomes beautifully divisible. To break this culture, Bangladesh needs something unfashionable: functioning institutions, swift and visible justice, punishment for mob leaders, and leaders in politics, media and business who refuse to convert rumour into verdict. Companies need due process, documented performance systems, protected disagreement and managers who can distinguish between whistleblowers and troublemakers.

Otherwise, we will continue to produce two kinds of mobs: one at the street corner and another in the boardroom. One uses fists. The other uses minutes of the meeting. Both are united by the same philosophy: think later, punish now.

The writer is the founder of BuildCon Consultancies Ltd and BuildNation Ltd

War revives European rooftop solar demand

REUTERS, *Frankfurt*

Demand for rooftop solar systems across Europe has surged since the start of the Iran war, as households rush to shield themselves from soaring power prices triggered by the worst global energy disruption in history.

The conflict has pushed oil, gas and electricity prices sharply higher, hitting companies and households alike and accelerating efforts to find cheaper alternatives and reduce exposure to volatile energy markets.

Solar is among those options, with demand from homeowners more than doubling for some industry players since the war began in late February, according to interviews with more than half a dozen energy equipment wholesalers and renewable utilities in Germany, Britain and the Netherlands.

It's a timely boost for a technology that accounts for about a third of Europe's total power capacity, but saw the pace of new installations dip last year for the first time in nearly a decade. Industry advocates argue Europe still needs to do far more to cut its reliance on imported oil and gas.

"The war has merely exposed the problem that has existed all along: energy dependency," said Janik Nolden, co-founder of German privately owned solar equipment wholesaler Solarhandel24, adding European governments had been "walking into a trap".

Solarhandel24 said net sales more than tripled in March to nearly 70 million euros ($82 million) from a year earlier, and are expected to triple again this month to as much as 60 million euros. The company plans to expand its workforce by about 85 people, roughly a third, to cope with demand.

To secure supply, Solarhandel24 has stocked up around half a million solar panels in recent weeks - a costly decision, Nolden said, but one he sees as worthwhile given the potential for net sales to rise to around 400 million euros in 2026 from about 250 million euros last year.

Iran economy looks set to withstand US naval blockade

AFP, *Doha*

A US naval blockade of Iranian ports is likely to squeeze Iran's oil output in the coming weeks but claims it will throw the Islamic republic into economic free fall remain premature, analysts say.

After weeks of bombing and counter-strikes, focus has shifted to the standoff in the Strait of Hormuz, which ordinarily carries around a fifth of the world's oil and liquefied natural gas.

In response to Iran's blockade of the strait since the start of the Middle East war, the US imposed a counter-blockade of the Islamic republic's ports, a push to force its leaders into a compromise in peace talks.

That bid, however, looks set to fail, at least in the short term.

"If the blockade lasts for more than two or three months, it can cause more damage" to Iran, economic analyst and professor at Shahid Beheshti University in Tehran Saeed Laylaz told AFP.

"If Iran suffers any damage, the damage to the countries in the southern Persian Gulf will definitely be greater," he added.

There's a limit on how long Iran can bide its time, however.

Arne Lohmann Rasmussen, chief analyst at Global Risk Management said Iran "was expected to run out of storage capacity within approximately one month, but it may already be forced to shut in part of its oil production within a couple of weeks".

'COLLAPSING FINANCIALLY?'

Trump said Tuesday that Iran was "collapsing financially" under the blockade imposed by the US Navy on April 12, claiming that the country was "starving for cash".

Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent said the blockade meant storage at Iran's Kharg Island, the main export terminal through which most of the country's crude is shipped, "will be full and the fragile Iranian oil wells will be shut in".

Jamie Ingram, managing editor of Middle East Economic Survey (MEES), told AFP it was likely the timeline for Iran to hit its oil storage limits would be measured in "weeks rather than days".

He added it was likely that "Iran will slightly reduce production before getting to the stage where storage constraints start to bite".

According to analysis by oil expert Homayoun Falakshahi shared by energy intelligence firm Kpler, Iran's crude production has already slowed since the start of the war.

Output fell by around 200,000 barrels per day in March to 3.68 million bpd and is expected to drop a further 420,000 bpd in April to about 3.43 million bpd, reflecting "the broader impact of export disruptions and refining constraints linked to the ongoing conflict," Falakshahi said.

But Laylaz in Tehran said beyond the psychological effect of the blockade, the "real material effect has been small so far".

Ingram said Kharg Island "shouldn't be a particular bottleneck," for Iran.

"This is the final storage facility used before oil is exported and Iran can divert crude oil to other facilities rather than straight to Kharg," he said.

'MUTUALLY ASSURED DISRUPTION'

The MEES expert also said Iran's dependency on oil exports via Hormuz had "deepened due to the damage caused by US and Israeli strikes to other sections of the Iranian economy".

"But Iran has also proven its ability to withstand huge oil-revenue declines during previous rounds of sanctions. I would not underestimate the regime's resilience in this regard," he added.

As the initial two-week truce between Iran and the US was set to expire Trump had said Tuesday he would maintain the ceasefire to allow more time for peace talks.

Iran said it welcomed the efforts by mediator Pakistan but made no other comment on Trump's announcement, while vowing not to reopen Hormuz so long as the US blockade remains in place.

"It will take a long time before such economic pain forces Iran to compromise," Ingram said, explaining it is "more likely economic disruption... pushes China into exerting more pressure on Iran to negotiate".

Ali Vaez, Iran project director at the International Crisis Group, said "Iran's economy was battered before the war, is contending with added strains caused during it, and now faces the combination of sanctions, seizures and potential strikes".

Iranians shop for fruits and vegetables in a market in northern Tehran on April 21, amid a ceasefire in the region.
PHOTO: AFP

Oil gains on lack of progress on truce talks

REUTERS, *Singapore*

Oil prices extended their gains on Thursday, rising more than $1 in the wake of stalled peace talks between Iran and the United States and as both nations maintained restrictions on the flow of trade through the Strait of Hormuz.

Brent crude futures rose $1.26, or 1.2 percent, to $103.17 a barrel at 0630 GMT, after settling above $100 for the first time in more than two weeks on Wednesday. West Texas Intermediate futures were also up $1.20, or 1.3 percent, at $94.16.

Both benchmarks closed more than $3 higher on Wednesday after larger-than-expected gasoline and distillate stock draws in the US, and over the lack of progress on Iran peace talks.

"The oil market is repricing expectations with little sign of progress in finding a resolution in the Persian Gulf," said ING analysts in a note, adding that hopes for a resolution are fading as peace talks stall.

"In addition, Iran's seizure of two vessels attempting to transit the Strait of Hormuz suggests disruptions to shipments are set to continue."

While US President Donald Trump extended a ceasefire between the countries following a request by Pakistani mediators, Iran and the US are still restricting the transit of ships through the strait, which carried about 20 percent of daily global oil supplies until the war began on February 28.

Iran seized two ships in the waterway on Wednesday, tightening its grip on the strategic chokepoint.