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Garment industry goes green to make eco-friendly apparels

Growing global demand catalyses transformation

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Country's garment industry is getting into a new era through phasing in eco-friendly technologies to meet a growing global demand for green products.

A number of local apparel makers have already acquired environment-friendly or green technology in their factory operations, in the meantime.

Many others are considering such option to follow suit for the sake of their long-term sustainability and greater competitiveness on the global market, industry-insiders said.

DBL, ABA Group, Viyellatex and Envoy Textiles are among the factories that have already switched over to green technology by reducing toxic emissions that harm the environment.

The virtues of the latest know-how also include energy efficiency, recycling byproducts and improving waste-management capacity of the factories.

According to the industry operators, a growing global demand for green products coupled with a rising pressure from international arena for ensuring workplace safety has changed present-day equation for many of the country's apparel makers.

Giant global retailers, according to them, are now paying much attention to the issues of workplace safety and other environmental aspects while buying their products for bio-conscious consumers across the world.

Green technology, also known as clean technology, refers to a process of operating and making products more environment-friendly ways. Green technology is, not only, helpful for lessening adverse effects on the environment but also plays a significant role in enhancing productivity, efficiency and operational performance of factories or production units.

To be certified as "green," a factory must be purely compliant--and all the elements used in the factory have to be tested by the US-based Green Building Concept (GBC).

Although the adoption of eco-friendly or green technology initially requires 'big' investments, such initiative could help increase the competitiveness of such factories in the long run as buyers usually offer 10 to 15 percent higher prices for eco-friendly products, according to the insiders.

Among others, the clean technology is effective in respect of waste management, water and energy savings through the increased uses of solar power and daylight, they added.

"In recent times, the number of green factories is increasing and our entrepreneurs are becoming more conscious about the environmental cost of production," President of Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA) Atiqul Islam said.

"Change might not be possible overnight, though, but the journey which has started will definitely take our industry to different heights," he added.

Application of eco-friendly measures is helping Viyellatex Group save 144 million litres of groundwater through

rainwater harvesting, reusing treated water from ETP for toilet flushing and drop-and-fill process at dyeing unit, 3 million m³ of natural gas and 35 percent energy per year, according to the company officials.

Viyellatex Group reduced carbon emissions by more than 25 per cent over five years since 2009, according to Systain, a Germany-based environmental consulting firm, reported last April.

It is committed to becoming a carbon-neutral company by 2016 in the transformation process.

Its energy-efficiency and carbon-reduction strategies include reusing condensed steam, using dryer exhaust, co-generation boiler and chiller, energy-efficient lighting and machinery like T5 lights, LED computer monitors and servo motors, evaporative Cooling pad and steam traps in ironing devices.

Another project of Viyellatex's Eco Couture factory is under construction on the outskirts of Dhaka. It would house a 144,000-sq-ft establishment for all its operations--from sewing to packing the finished products.

The project will be LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design)-certified.

To minimize the washing and rinsing operation, DBL Group is using three effective rinses instead of 4-5 rinses (normally practiced) and the water used per rinse 6 ltr/kg while average industry practices 21 ltr/kg.

The group also uses SCLAVOS dyeing machines which reduce the water ratio from 1:8 to 1:6 and ensure optimum use of gas and electricity through using PLEVA moisture controller in dryer and Stenter to determine moisture content of fabrics and temperature required to dry that.

After the successful completion of the project Cleaner Production, DBL Group is conducting the second phase of CP named Partnership for Cleaner Textile (PaCT).

CPI2 project is an initiative by popular brands and retailers like Tom Tailor, Tchibo, S.Oliver, Otto Group, QVC and many more. It is supported by German Federal Ministry of the Environment and the German Investment and Development Company DEG (KfW group).

After the execution of all the recommendations by CPI2 (Carbon Performance Improvement Initiative), the factory benefited from an overall energy savings of 1,759,648 kWh worth Tk 0.84 million (Tk 84,46,310) in 2013 compared to previous year.

The CO₂-emission reduction was 1,372 tons in 2013 compared to previous year, according to DBL officials.

The main theme for a green factory is 3R: reduce, recycle and reuse.

Shahidullah Azim, managing director of Classic Fashion Concept, came up with such a definition of the eco-friendly system of production.

Sustainable practices and eco-friendly operations are emerging as a global standard in the developed countries. And this encouraged the local manufactures to set up the green factories to meet the international standards, he said.

His group-Classic--- is setting up a platinum green factory at Ragendrapur in Gazipur, creating employment for about 4,000 workers.

"Nowadays, there is a separate corner in the global retailers' chain shop. There they sell products with the level 'green products' that are collected from the green factories with improved hygienic conditions, and consumers also pay higher," said Abdus Salam Murshedy, managing director of Envoy Group.

His company has launched another green project at Rajendrapur, covering an area of 30 bighas and accommodating about 5,000 workers.

"To retain the market in the long run, it now has become a demand of time to set up eco-friendly factories," he added.

"It has now become a necessity for us to make our factories eco-friendly as the buyers want to pay us more only if we can meet their demand producing the products in an environmentally sound atmosphere," said Faruque Hassan, managing director of Giant Group.

"Though setting up a green factory costs 30 to 40 percent higher investment than a traditional one, it saves money in the long run as it helps in reducing the cost of utility services such as power and water," said Mr Azim.

It also helps a factory in image branding as a socially responsible one committed to protecting the environment and people as a whole, he said.

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