

WHERE NOW FOR GREEN FASHION? COVID-19 AND THE READY-MADE GARMENTS INDUSTRY (RMG) CRISIS IN BANGLADESH

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ABSTRACT

In the past two decades the global fashion industry has been severely criticized for its failure to tackle climate change and sustainability issues across its supply chains. The response of many in the industry has addressed key criticisms by encouraging new codes of practice that apply to all stages of the supply chain. Industry-wide efforts have, however, become severely affected by the COVID-19 crisis in 2020, providing not just a crisis to green fashion, but also an existential threat to companies and organisations across the world due to the sharp decline in international trade. This article examines key issues relating to green fashion, the global COVID-19 pandemic and the crisis in the RMG industry in Bangladesh. The focus of the article is Bangladesh, the second largest centre for clothing manufacturing in the world and will concentrate on supply chain relationships relating to the manufacturing, distribution and disposal of clothing and those sustainability issues arising.

Keywords: Bangladesh, Fashion Industry, Ready-Made Garments, COVID-19, South Asian Business.

INTRODUCTION

In the past two decades the global fashion industry has been severely criticized for its failure to tackle climate change and sustainability issues across its supply chains (Bauck, 2017; Bick, Halsey, & Ekenga, 2018). From the production of clothing materials, leather, cotton, synthetic materials, etc., through to manufacturing and distribution processes, clothing companies have been associated with the misuse of plastics, chemical dyes and electricity. The response of many in the industry has addressed key criticisms by encouraging new codes of practice that apply to all stages of the supply chain. These codes have covered broad measures to tackle key sustainability issues through the adoption of ethical ways of doing business and the use of materials and processes which cause less pollution and have a small CO₂ footprint. Industry-wide efforts have, however, become severely affected by the COVID-19 crisis in 2020, providing not just a crisis to 'Green Fashion', but also an existential threat to companies and organisations across the world due to the sharp decline in international trade.

This article examines key issues related to green fashion, the global COVID-19 pandemic and the crisis in the RMG industry in Bangladesh. The focus of the article is Bangladesh, the second largest centre for clothing manufacturing in the world and will concentrate on supply chain relationships relating to the manufacturing, distribution and disposal of clothing and those sustainability issues arising. The main argument of this research is that the COVID-19 pandemic has created severe economic hardship in Bangladesh as elsewhere in the world. That economic hardship has placed extreme hardship on the national healthcare service and caused additional health-related issues. The RMG industry in Bangladesh has been hit hard in this crisis due to problems accessing garment production countries, namely China, and due to the crisis of consumer confidence in western countries, leading to cancelled orders with Bangladeshi manufacturers (Sen et al., 2020). This economic crisis has affected climate change and sustainability in two ways. Investment in climate change initiatives is at risk and secondly poverty-alleviation, closely linked to the climate change crisis, has become harder due to the global economic decline especially in the fashion industry. The main methodological approach for this article includes discussions and engagement with fashion experts with as well as workers and media in Bangladesh.

This article has four central arguments relating to the impact of COVID-19 on Green Fashion, sustainability and RMG manufacturing in Bangladesh. COVID-19 has caused an economic meltdown to the RMG industry in Bangladesh causing owners to slash costs including initiatives to scale up more sustainable ways of working and producing cloths and fashion accessories. The second argument is that wholesale job losses have led to greater poverty in the country, a key factor that is linked to greater climate degradation and making it harder for the population to adopt climate change mitigation and adaptation policies. The third argument is that Bangladesh faced particular problems, caught as it was between rising raw material prices coming from China due to its own COVID-19 lockdown in 2020 and a consumer spending collapse in fashion and clothing across Europe, one of Bangladesh's major markets. Linked to this, the final argument of this paper exposes weaknesses in codes of ethics between Bangladesh and the developed world, often signed in the aftermath of the Savar building collapse in 2013, which seek to encourage better employment practices and working conditions in the RMG industry in Bangladesh. These codes do not cater for emergency or crisis management of contracts and many RMG companies in Bangladesh that have been disproportionately affected by supply-chain cancellations or delays rendering such codes as ineffective.

CLIMATE CHANGE AND FASHION

The global rise in the earth's surface temperature in coming decades will bring increased instances of flooding, drought and volatile weather patterns. One of the main industries causing climate change is textiles and garments, responsible for some 5% of current global carbon emissions (Bauck, 2017; Bick, et al., 2018). There is common acknowledgement that every stage in the production and consumption of garments creates increasing pollution and emission problems for the fashion world. These processes have created highly complex supply-chain issues creating contractors and sub-contractors in supplying fashion garments. While

companies are active in managing and auditing these supply chains, other evidence suggests that clothing companies have too little knowledge of supply-chain issues and can ignore the injustices that can result. The Rana Plaza building collapse in Bangladesh in 2013 is an important case study where western clothing companies denied knowledge of clothing activity in the building after its collapse killing some 1000 people.

The fashion industry can be perceived “the design, manufacturing, distribution, marketing, retailing, advertising, and promotion of all types of apparel (men’s, women’s, and children’s) from the most rarefied and expensive *haute couture* (literally, “high sewing”) and designer fashions to ordinary everyday clothing” (Britannia, 2020). The industry is heavily dependent on supply chains as networks between a company and its suppliers to produce and distribute products through to the consumer. Supply chains develop as “a network between a company and its suppliers to produce and distribute a specific product to the final buyer” (Kenton, 2020). This network includes different activities, people, entities, information, and resources. Business developments in the fashion industry have focused attention on its relationship with sustainability, for example, the rise of fast fashion describes clothing designs that move quickly from production to consumers allowing the market to react more quickly to ever-evolving tastes. Fashion Week events often provide fashion houses with new collections. One important factor to note is that “fast fashion allows mainstream consumers to purchase trendy clothing at affordable prices” (Hayes, 2020). Many in the industry have criticized the environment waste associated with fast fashion, especially in the over-production and wastage of clothes, and advocate the use of slow fashion which, it is argued, better safeguards the environment.

There is little doubt, though, that in the past few years, more groups have become vocal in linking climate change and fashion. This has produced a number of industry-linked initiatives such as at the COP 24 meeting in Poland in December 2017. In 2018 and 2019, the protest group Extinction Rebellion has protested at fashion industry events in major European countries. Together with the Fridays for Future movement led by the Swedish teenager, Greta Thunberg, Extinction Rebellion has been responsible for highlighting environmental problems associated with key industries such as aviation and fashion, resulting in a sharp rise in political, media and public interest in many countries in the past year.

There is strong recognition among development aid groups, NGOs and charities argues that fashion houses outsource production of their clothing to developing nations for economic reasons and that such outsourcing pays little more than subsistence wages with workers often sub-contracted to smaller companies that offer harsh working conditions and employment environment. In academia, too, Bick, Halsey and Ekenga (2018) point to the key injustices associated with fashion, climate change and UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), especially poverty alleviation. Linking poverty alleviation to climate change has placed many industries, including fashion, under the spotlight of criticism placing them on the defensive about workplace conditions and rates of pay. Such issues linked to poor pay and slave-like hours in the industry, especially in developing countries like Bangladesh, have created negative publicity for the industry undermining corporate reputations. Many fashion companies fail to promote fully the idea of ensuring all workers earn a proper living wage or work in better factory conditions. This argument also extends to climate change where thoughtless and irresponsible corporations produce waste through global supply chains, contributing to the increasing pollution of oceans with plastics, for example.

Bick, Halsey and Ekenga (2018) highlight problems with supply chains when discussing one important area of fashion, namely fast fashion, which emphasizes quick turnaround of clothing lines to keep up with western fashion demands. Fast Fashion can lead to excessive waste across the supply chain. They argue:

... the unequal distribution of environmental exposures disproportionately impacts communities in low and middle-income countries (LMICs). There is an emerging need for research that examines the adverse health outcomes associated with fast fashion at each stage of the supply chain and post-consumer process, particularly in LMICs. Advancing work in this area will inform the translation of research findings to public health policies and practices that lead to sustainable production and ethical consumption, particularly in LMICs (Bick, et al., 2018, p.3).

Excessive or rampant consumerism is the result. The authors see the fashion industry closely tied to forces of global capitalism. Global capitalism draws admirers and critics in equal measure. According to different political standpoints, global capitalism can be viewed – positively - as promoting new forms of liberal individual or collective power in contemporary societies or – negatively, as we see above - as instrumental in reinforcing economic and social disparities such as poverty and human rights violations in the developing world. Fashion is a key industry for global capitalism.

Criticizing fashion does ignore some of the improvements made by companies in recent years, for example, through reforms to supply chain management and/or through explicit Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) policies. Research is also growing from those internal to the fashion industry, in the form of industry-backed associations, think tanks, consultancies, etc., as well as academics interested in how businesses can improve sustainability across supply chains. One way is to examine the role of innovation that stresses environmental improvements in the fashion industry through technological advancements or entrepreneurial endeavour, rather than by what they term as ‘utopian’ social change. Industry groups too are busy writing reports stressing business and technological solutions to key areas.

The Global Fashion Agenda (2017) industry initiative is a ‘global leadership forum on fashion sustainability founded in 2016 and anchored around Copenhagen Fashion Summit, the world’s principal event on sustainability in fashion for industry decision-makers (2017, p.1). It is aimed at mobilising the global fashion industries to bring changes on the ways of fashion production and consumption. The Global Change Award (2016) report, sponsored by Accenture and the H&M Foundation states:

The Global Change Award is one of the world's biggest challenges for early stage innovation and the first initiative of its kind within fashion. It takes on one of the biggest challenges facing today's fashion industry – creating fashion for a growing population, while having a positive impact on the environment (Accenture and HM Foundation, 2016, p.1).

While the expansion of industry initiatives and reports can be criticised as window dressing, academic research is available demonstrating the possibility of the industry to make financial returns and take serious initiatives towards greater environmental sustainability. Work by Assmann (2018), for example, demonstrates how fast-fashion retailers have been able to stabilize their market presence through domestic and global expansion as well as through a diversification of strategies that include a combination of low retail prices, cooperation with high-end luxury designers, and *an emphasis on sustainability and environmental consciousness*.

BANGLADESH, COVID-19 AND THE INTERRUPTION OF INTERNATIONAL TRADE

Bangladesh is a developing country with a population exceeding 162 million people. The country has the second largest centre for clothing manufacturing in the world. Agriculture is its largest economic activity with textiles and RMG its largest manufacturing industry exporting more than \$(US) 35 billion worth of goods in 2017. Due to a massive global outbreak of COVID-19 in early 2020, Bangladesh has faced a conundrum in form of a ripple effect to her economic activities with the disruptions to her supply chains, as her industries are highly dependent on Chinese suppliers for raw materials. In trade and transaction value, China is Bangladesh's largest trading partner and provides the biggest source of the country's raw materials. Bangladesh Bank data showed that in fiscal 2018-2019, China accounted for \$56 billion of goods imported into Bangladesh, which is more than a fifth of the country's total (The Daily Star, 2020).

The volatile period of global economy started in January 2020 with a declaration by the Chinese government restricting mobility and travel to and from the country as well as starting a series of social lockdowns, with many regions quarantined to staunch the rapid transmission of coronavirus (OECD, 2020). The epicentre for the pandemic was the city of Wuhan. As a result, China suffered a rapid downturn in manufacturing production, which hit regional and global supply chains. This, in turn, affected the raw materials bound for Bangladesh affecting one of the world's manufacturing hubs of the world. The stark reality was that Bangladesh's dependence on Chinese raw materials, similar to many countries, faced major robust disruptions. This disruption to Bangladesh's supply chain management resulted in a major downturn in trade. According to an estimate published by the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) in February 2020, the trade impact to Bangladesh in the immediate aftermath of China's lockdown at the start of the COVID-19 pandemic was \$16 million (The Daily Star, 2020). Moreover, in the case of the leather goods, the impact was \$15 million and \$1 million for textiles and apparels. Continuing manufacturing problems due to Chinese efforts to curb transmission of the virus meant that Bangladeshi RMG workers became one of the worst hit groups in the country.

Bangladesh depends on China for 50 percent of raw materials required for the RMG industry, and nearly 40 percent of machinery and spare parts for the industry (Perera, 2020). Due to COVID-19 restrictions after January 2020, and with China under lockdown, many Bangladeshi RMG businesses put their workers on reduced hours, furlough measures or voluntary or forced redundancies due to the lack of raw materials and safety equipment coming from China. This period extended through the following months as Chinese activities only slowly recovered in processing raw material orders. One survey found that 93 percent of Bangladesh suppliers faced a delay in the shipments of the raw materials during this pandemic (Anner, 2020). Besides these, the price of raw materials increased due to these delays.

Therefore, factories and manufacturing companies were late in processing orders for readymade garments for the biggest brands and retail stores in Europe and North America with the result bringing cancellation of many shipments. Bangladeshi factories incurred large losses to shipments due to the sharp rise in raw material prices from China and order cancellations from Europe. These losses could not often be clawed back from wholesalers and distributors due to contract arrangements and the unwillingness for flexibility. What had been a Bangladesh success story for 30 years became, almost overnight, an existential fight for survival for many companies due to the huge amount of loss in the sector. According to a MiB report (Mapped in Bangladesh) based upon the Rapid Survey phase 2, 198 RMG factories closed permanent in the first few months of the pandemic, while another 286 factories were temporarily closed and were unable to pay the wages of the workers and so issued them an unpaid leave (Chowdhury et al., 2020). These temporary closures were able to resume some production from June 2020. As a result, nearly a million Bangladeshi workers lost their jobs. According to the Asian Development Bank (ADB), 894,930 workers became unemployed in Bangladesh due to the outbreak of the virus (Perera, 2020).

The twin problems faced by the RMG sector in Bangladesh was with its Chinese suppliers of equipment and raw materials and with its European wholesalers and retailers. China suffered at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic in January and February 2020, with key European fashion markets such as France, Italy, Spain and the UK, being hardest hit in Europe with the numbers of COVID-19 victims from March onwards.



https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=File:Retail_sales_June2020-03.jpg

According to Eurostat (2020), the statistics office of the European Union, in July 2020, total European retail trade decreased by 1.2 percent compared with February 2020. However, if you look at the textiles, clothes and footwear sector, trade had declined by 22% in just four months. This led to many European retail brands to cancel or scale back on orders from Bangladesh exposing weaknesses in contracts and codes of ethics between manufacturers and retailers.

To recapitulate from a logistic point of view, RMG industries are extremely time-sensitive and depend wholly upon supply chains from the very start to the end of the manufacturing process. From the collection of raw materials to delivery of the product at the specified place in time. RMG enjoys a short life-cycle as collections change quickly, partly due to fast fashion expectations in the West, and by strong seasonal peaks in production. Disruptions to the supply chain due to COVID-19 put owners of the industries in Bangladesh at real risk and thus placed the whole economy into recession.

FINANCIAL REPERCUSSIONS FOR THE RMG INDUSTRY

With the increasing rate of unemployment during the global outbreak of COVID-19, Bangladesh experienced challenging times as a developing country. The shortage of raw materials due to the disruptions in supply chains, continuous cancellation of orders by the brands and retailers and the high raw material prices pushed the economy into severe decline. One study from the University of Delaware calculated that there was 10.0 percent decline in RMG exports leading to between a 4.0 percent and 9.0 percent drop in employment in Bangladesh. 105 million people are employed in the apparel industry (Sally, 2020). Of these, up to 40 million manufacturing workers could be vulnerable to losing their current work due to the closure of factories as orders dried up during the COVID-19 (Kelly, 2020). Due to a large number of cancellations by wholesalers and retailers, workers are experiencing tremendous financial problems in 2020. The owners of the industries in Bangladesh struggled to help as they continued trying to revive their industries from threats of bankruptcy. As Syed Hasibuddin Hussain, project manager for MiB, argues: ‘Two or three order cancellations and the factory goes bust. With the delay of shipment, how are they going to pay salaries?’ (Cernansky, 2020).

Owners of manufacturing companies are trying to revive businesses in this anomalous situation, cutting costs so that they can save the industry and seek to restore a once vibrant industry as well as the Bangladesh economy. Reviving fortunes will help some of those who lost jobs back into the employment market, but not all. As Mostafiz Uddin, Managing Director of Denim export, stated, ‘Without having an income, factory owners may be forced to cut jobs. Indeed, the owner of the manufacturing companies does not seek employee reduction intentionally. They are forced to do it’ (Cernansky, 2020). Workers have had to embrace new realities by looking for other sources of income while the government and the RMG industry seek to recover from this current grim situation. Owners of the factories and manufacturing companies are keeping a minimum core workforce, those highly skilled and experienced in order to chart the path back to recovery.

This situation places severe strain in trust between workers and employers of RMG. Not only are workers suffering with no or little wages and without any savings, but also members of their families are dependent on them. Families are therefore suffering despite being part of what has been seen traditionally as a lucrative and successful industry in Bangladesh. Public protests, driven by extreme poverty, have seen workers demand their wages. On 25th of July, thousands of garment workers blocked the Dhaka-Mymensingh highway to demand unpaid wages and allowances. Police attacked the protestors using batons, gunshots, teargas and sound grenades and 12 workers were injured in that incident. According to the Financial Express of August 11 2020, Bangladeshi workers had already lost US \$500 million in wages in three months from March to June this (Munni, 2020). According to Munni (2020), the average monthly salary of an RMG worker is about \$112 a month. Therefore, these points clearly demonstrate the extra financial distress caused by the pandemic.

HEALTHCARE AND MENTAL WELLBEING

Even in better times, the RMG industry imposes long hours and harsh conditions for many workers. With the onset of COVID-19, workers have faced mental health pressures linked to actual and feared redundancies from their respective factories. Added to this was the fear in being infected with COVID-19 within cramped factory environments and passing it on to family members.

The James P Grant School of Public Health, BRAC University (JPGSPS), conducted a survey mainly with RMG workers and urban youth over mobile phones from 6 to 13 April (Prothom Alo, 2020). There were 1,309 respondents to the survey and JPGSPS found that among the respondents, 58 percent had no income at all while 29 percent only had partial income and the income of the rest 13 percent was unchanged. More than one third of the respondents stated they were mainly living on rice, lentils and potatoes, contrary to medical advice stating that a proper balanced diet with proteins and proper nutrition helps maintain a natural, strong and healthy immune system to fight the effects of COVID-19. Poverty among many workers and a resulting inadequate diet has also contributed to increased stress levels in many households.

Furthermore, limited access to healthcare of these low-wage workers is a grave matter as, in general, workers in RMG factories were not paid sick leave, nor was national healthcare developed for workers. Many workers have sought to hide sickness, including COVID-19, for fear of being sacked, causing a major threat for co-workers as there are few safety measures to staunch transmission of the virus in one of the world's most crowded countries. Basic healthcare is lacking for many. In total, there are only 500 Intensive Care Unit (ICU) beds available for nearly 170 million people in Bangladesh (Sen et al., 2020). Even the most affluent groups might not have access to ICU beds. Despite knowing the very poor condition of medical services in the country, workers continue moving to the capital city, Dhaka, to find work.

Having experienced a sharp economic decline between January and June 2020, the Bangladeshi economy enjoyed better economic health in July 2020 with industries staging a minor recovery, including RMG. Any sustained recovery after the slowdown could change the whole scenario for the RMG workers. According to the MiB, cited earlier in this article, since July 2020 1,850 (79 percent) factories have resumed their operations near to full capacity, 286 (12 percent) factories are temporarily closed and 198 (9 percent) factories have permanently closed (Chowdhury et al., 2020). Sustained recovery could lead to many workers regaining jobs and salaries helping to fund healthcare and proper nutritional diets. However, other countries have seen second or even third waves of the virus, especially in markets key to RMG output such as Western Europe and the USA.

MEASURES NEEDED IN THE RMG INDUSTRY: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

There are four key points that emerge from the development of the COVID-19 pandemic in recent months. The first point is that COVID-19 has caused economic devastation to the RMG industry in Bangladesh causing owners to slash costs, especially work places. This crisis also affects sustainability insofar as owners have lost substantial amounts of money, threatening bankruptcy, and are cutting back on costs rather than investing money in essential items such equipment. As Khan et al. (2020) argue there are various key requirements for sustainability linked to resources. The first is the requirement of specialist machinery for sustainability:

The garments also concerned the conservation of sustainability-friendly environment within the production area. The garments may determine which machine types to guarantee green safety and sustainability based on customer demand (Khan et al., 2020, p.4).

The second area requires owners of RMG companies to accept that sustainability affects their profit margins:

Green-oriented RMG companies' significant strategic task is to obtain some sorts of potential opportunities along with profit minimization and efficient use of environmental resources, which can evaluate the company for generating quality for their prospective customers (Khan et al., 2020, p.4).

The problem is that repeated waves of any virus, especially in the key export markets in the West, deprive owners of the profit margins needed for sustainability investments. Initiatives seeking to scale up sustainable ways of working and producing cloths and fashion accessories are undermined by COVID-19 and its pernicious effects. There is no easy solution as COVID-19 is a global pandemic, which has paralysed economies around the world in addition to its health costs.

The second argument is that wholesale job losses in the RMG industry has led to greater poverty in Bangladesh, as well as causing increasing threats to health and mental wellbeing, leading to pressures on a very weak healthcare system through COVID-19 infections and a general worsening of poverty leading to conditions linked to malnutrition. Poverty is a key factor linked to greater climate degradation, making it harder for the population to face the problems of climate change such as extreme weather events. This concept is central to the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) as Sakamoto et al. (2020) argue:

Coming back to the initial question of the extent to which the prior attainment of SDGs could have contributed to reducing the spread of COVID-19 and brought a rapid recovery from its damage, the answer is "substantially." How long people can survive without outside support is one of the key issues in this pandemic, and this is an important consideration in evaluating the degree of SDGs attainment. This capacity of tolerance is a holistic assessment rather than a measure of the indicators presently defined in each SDG. Moreover, this capacity can be increased through a harmonized achievement of SDGs. Depending on countries' situations and types of crisis, critical SDGs may vary based on several factors. In the case of COVID-19 in Bangladesh, SDG 1 (No Poverty), SDG 8 (Decent Work and

Economic Growth), and SDG 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities) would have been critical in securing the capacity for tolerance among the people. If people had been wealthier, they would have more reserves. If people had better social protection, they would not need to worry about their employment status (Sakamoto et al., 2020, p.10).

The pandemic has clearly highlighted the key issue of poverty and the very fragile state of nations like Bangladesh, less able to plan and react to crises like COVID-19.

The third argument is that Bangladesh has been caught negatively between two larger and more powerful trading blocs, on the one hand seeing rising raw material prices from China due to its own COVID-19 lockdown in 2020, and key European and North American consumer markets where spending for fashion and clothing has collapsed. At the time of writing this article, (September), large parts of Europe and the USA, including President Trump himself, life remains deeply problematic due to the pandemic and this reflects public spending on goods and services.

Linked to this, the final argument of this paper exposes weaknesses in codes of ethics between Bangladesh and the developed world, often signed in the aftermath of the Savar building collapse in 2013, which seek to encourage better employment practices and working conditions in the RMG industry in Bangladesh. These codes do not cater for emergency or crisis management of contracts. Many RMG companies in Bangladesh are disproportionately affected by supply-chain cancellations or delays rendering such codes ineffectual. As Majumdar et al. (2020), point out, western companies are using force majeure regulations as a catch all way to protect themselves:

Although collaboration among the supply chain partners is one of the potent strategies for risk mitigation, unfortunately, it has limited adoption in clothing supply chains. With suppliers having little or no bargaining power, brands have used their dominant power positions to cancel or postpone orders that have been completed or are in production; forced the suppliers to offer brutal discounts; and refused to pay on stipulated time... Interviewees from the suppliers' side felt that some of the brands unethically invoked the *force majeure* clause for their impunity. However, with looming fear of losing business, suppliers often have little choice but to comply (Majumdar et al., 2020, p.10).

We argue that renegotiating the terms for the future ethics codes between the buyers and manufacturers should be reviewed. This review should cover the responsibilities and obligations of the buyers and sellers at times of global crisis in international trade and development. COVID-19 has revealed potential weaknesses in such agreements with the RMG sector in Bangladesh and require further research and analysis, including the terms and conditions in dealing with the biggest brands and retailers around the world. The pandemic, as in so many other countries, has resulted in the suffering of owners, employers and workers of the RMG sector. One potential solution would be to hold in trust reserves on profits in the form of an emergency trust fund that could be used by employers of the garments, factories and manufacturing companies to cushion cash requirements for wages of RMG workers to lessen shocks arising from failure to pay wages on time or redundancy.

While the Bangladesh government has tried to support the industry through the economic crisis as RMG generates about \$30 billion in exports, almost 83 percent of the total exports from Bangladesh and 14 percent of GDP. Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina announced a bailout package of TK 50 billion to support export-oriented industries on 25th of March, 2020 (Mahmood, 2020). She also announced another stimulus package of TK 67.7 billion in April 2020. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) has also provided a loan of \$732 million to face the challenges of COVID-19 (Mahmood, 2020). Bangladesh has also sought to mitigate the emerging crisis and the national budget of 2020-2021 allocating TK 386.88 billion. However, these stimulus packages do not seem robust alone to meet the current needs and business leaders.

Finally, one cannot ignore the broader problems caused to Bangladesh caused by COVID-19. A worker cannot perform well when he or she is worried about the consequences of infection from a dangerous virus. Low-wage earners are least able to cope in such emergencies, especially with poor provision of health coverage and social conditions.

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