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# Support of suppliers and buyers vital for apparel sector recovery

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- **Study by IPS and Bangladesh's CPD says a joint collaborative effort required from suppliers and brand buyers to recover to pre-COVID levels**
- **Urges suppliers and buyers to play a more active role in ensuring sustainability of markets they supply and source from**
- **SL's apparel exports fell by 27.6% in 2020 from a year ago, generating an export loss of US \$ 1.15bn**

By Shabiya Ali Ahlam

The pandemic-struck apparel sectors of Sri Lanka and Bangladesh are in urgent need of joint collaborative efforts from suppliers and brand buyers if the industry, which is a key revenue generator for both the nations, is to return to normalcy. An analysis carried out by the Institute of Policy Studies (IPS), Sri Lanka and Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD), Bangladesh, stressed that for speedy and sustainable recovery of the apparel sectors, it is imperative for value chain-based solutions to materialise at the earliest.

"A joint collaborative effort is needed from the suppliers and from the brand buyers to gradually move the apparel sector from the ongoing COVID-19 period to pre-COVID-19 level. This can be done by redistributing orders as well as providing various types of social support from the sourcing country's government," said CPD Bangladesh Research Director Khondaker Golam Moazzem addressing a webinar this week.

He asserted that only such initiatives would help pull the hard-hit apparel sector workers out of stress.

According to the analysis, the raw material suppliers and buyers must step up efforts during the ongoing challenging times by playing a more active role in ensuring the sustainability of the markets they supply and source from.

Moazzem, presenting the bulk of the analysis findings, said that reshoring efforts, which kicked off last year due to the pandemic, should continue to flow into countries such as Bangladesh and Sri Lanka, as the order share distribution could help the nations' apparel sectors to maintain operation and provide for their workers.

Data from the Sri Lanka Apparel Exporters Association revealed that in 2020, apparel exports fell by 27.6 percent from a year ago, generating an export earnings loss of US \$ 1.15 billion.

In a bid to stay afloat, the industry has explored the option of relocating their factories around the country and overseas, reducing reliance on imported fabric and producing locally, diversifying the product basket and moving away from luxury items to manufacturing essentials.

Bangladesh, on the other hand, saw its apparel export earnings decline by 17 percent during the year of the pandemic, resulting in an export loss of US \$ 5.60 billion, according to the data released by the Export Promotion Bureau, Bangladesh.

Following an approach that is similar to Sri Lanka, the apparel sector in Bangladesh reacted to the crisis situation by diversifying the product basket, exploring new markets and shifting to online platforms, due to the restriction on movement.

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