

IMAGE PICTURE BY ENVOY TEXTILES



GREEN DENIM ROUTINE

*ENVOY TEXTILES DOES SOME THINGS DIFFERENTLY, BUT A LOT RIGHT.
MEET ONE OF THE LARGEST DENIM PRODUCERS IN BANGLADESH.*

Text **Julia Mönnich**

Bangladesh is green. In two ways, in fact: Once you leave the megacity of Dhaka and its more than 17 million inhabitants (and that's only the registered population!), with the innumerable and unfinished high-rises about which nobody knows if they are being constructed or torn down, the crazy streets with the even crazier traffic, the tangled cables from which nobody will ever be able to find any particular terminal, the construction sites, shacks, pushcarts, the many, many people who are simply everywhere, as is the garbage—once you leave this chaotic, loud, surging and colorful mixture, then you arrive in Paradise: Small meandering rivers wind their way through palm groves, mango trees, fields, rice paddies and meadows, bringing water to scattered farms and the people, animals

and plants there. There are no streets here, no cars, no garbage. Cows and horses graze wherever they choose. Lonely Planet calls it “a rural wonderland,” and rightly so, “filling your vision with more hues of green than you ever knew existed.”

But it is not only these flat stretches of land that make Bangladesh so green. It's also the people, such as Kutubuddin Ahmed, founder and chairman of Envoy Textiles Limited: In Mymensingh, approximately 60 kilometers north of the capital city, he and his family, as he respectfully calls his 2,800 employees, run a denim factory: The word “factory” may be correct, but not exactly: The large buildings are on over 100 acres of land where spinning, dyeing and weaving goes on around the clock, but the property seems

much more like a settlement, a small city: The large production facilities have multistory buildings around them, built from the country's typical orange-red bricks, and in them are offices, labs, showrooms, a bakery, a cafeteria, a grocery store, an air-conditioned cinema, three multiple audio-visual centers for training and further education and apartments for employees. A lake lies in the middle and it does not only look good but also serves another important function. Mango groves, jackfruit trees, trees and shrubs with orange and pink blossoms and hibiscus hedges line walkways and small squares and birds twitter. There is a guesthouse with a pool, its own kitchen and six-star comfort, a 24-hour infirmary and a helipad. That is what you learn about Envoy at first glance. You only learn that every employee has health insurance (including his or her immediate family), that they get schooling and vocational training, have sick pay and old age benefits, and are honored on their birthdays when you speak to the envoy chairman manager Kutubuddin Ahmed: "In the region we are a popular employer not only because we are the largest denim manufacturer in Bangladesh but also because of the many things we do for our employees, for example we pay wages on the first of the month, we have two gyms, and offer free Wi-Fi and Internet access, making mobile banking possible." And those are only some of the approximately 50 employee benefits and welfare programs of the company.



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—Kutubuddin Ahmed,
Chairman, Envoy Textiles

Envoy first began denim production in 2008 and became a public limited company in 2012. Each month Envoy produces 4.5 million yards of denim; its own spinning facility has the capacity to produce 1,900 tons of yarn a month. Envoy offers denim fabrics in all varieties—at the showroom in Mymensingh everything is available, denims weighing from 4.25 oz to 15 oz, in 100% cotton and a variety of blends, and in every color and finish imaginable (incidentally, Ahmed does not think gray denim is good because of its ecological balance...). Speed collections are offered to respond quickly to short-term requests, as well as vintage collections which, due to Envoy's high technical production standards can also fulfill unusual customer enquiries. And there are sustainable collections, which are sourced from eco materials such as organic cotton, BCI cotton and natural dye materials, and are sustainably processed using laser or ozone washing. Envoy exports 100% of its production and works for companies throughout the world, including Levi's, Uniqlo, Kontoor, H&M, Gap, Bestseller, Inditex, C&A, Calvin Klein, M&S, Tesco and Waikiki.

The cotton spun here is mostly from the US. Ahmed says the price of cotton is high, but the quantity processed by Envoy offsets that again. Envoy also buys cotton remnants from other producers and recycles them for those companies lacking the necessary technical equipment. Ahmed repeatedly emphasizes that only machines of the latest standard are running at Envoy, at all levels—for ball wrapping and dyeing as well as for liquid dosing, weaving and finishing. And indeed: If you walk through the clean, well-lit buildings and labs, you feel as though you are at an international technical university which has brought the newest products from around the world together in one place.

The demanding and sustainable approach to dealing with products and the people who produce them earned Envoy, as the first denim mill in the world, LEED platinum certification, in 2016. Envoy has committed itself to many other agreements and seals, including the Detox Campaign by Greenpeace, ZDHC (Zero Discharge of Hazardous Chemicals) chemical guidelines, PaCT (Partnership for Cleaner Textile), and CPI² (Carbon Footprint Initiative), always with the goal of reducing the consumption of water, energy and chemicals, as well as carbon dioxide emissions. It's paying off: This summer Envoy Textiles Limited was the only institution honored with the National Environment Award 2019. "This award is not only a recognition of our genuine devotion, but also a spur to our continuous efforts in environmental concerns," the company says.

While in other factories, in other countries, discussions and controversy continue over saving water and "less waste management" or the issue is completely ignored, at Envoy saving resources is already a daily routine. Envoy saves over 100 million liters of water every year through rain-water harvesting alone. Using a waste heat recovery boiler means saving 2 million cubic meters of gas a year. The production facilities are so well lit that no artificial light is required 12 hours a day. All employees move around the spacious grounds of the mill CO₂ neutral—on foot or in an electric golf cart. "And we continue to work hard on it," says Ahmed, who was not forced by any government or other state regulation to take these steps. Respecting workers and nature is part of daily operations at Envoy. That this is not just an empty phrase is shown most clearly by the lake on the factory grounds: Purified water from the denim production flows into this lake—and the fish in there do wonderfully well—until they are eaten. The same is true for the cow grazing on the banks that provides fresh milk for yogurt. "Those are the best performance indicators for our work," says Ahmed, laughing. Fish, cows, welfare and healthcare—none of that can conceal the fact that this is a tough business carried on in a highly adversarial market. According to Ziaur Rahman, woven supply chain manager at H&M, speaking at the International Denim Expo in Dhaka in May, Bangladesh is the second-largest supplier of denim in the world, and H&M alone works with about 300 suppliers in Bangladesh. Yet, if you know—whether as a buyer, retailer or consumer—that this fabric has been produced with this expertise under these conditions in this country, then you can be proud if those jeans say: "Made in Bangladesh."