US-tariffs are disrupting the global textile and apparel value chains resulting in higher prices in the U.S.

The U.S. administration's decision to unilaterally impose sweeping tariff increases on imported goods represents a significant challenge to the existing global trading system, which has long been structured around multilateral (WTO), regional, and bilateral (FTA) trade agreements.

K. V. Srinivasan, President of the International Textile Manufacturers Federation, emphasized that "these substantial tariff hikes will have a major impact on textile imports, particularly apparel, into the U.S." Currently, approximately 95% of apparel sold in the U.S. is imported, with the majority sourced from China (about 30%), Vietnam (13%), India (8%), Bangladesh (6%), and Indonesia (5.5%). To put this into perspective, these countries, which previously faced tariffs of 11-12%, will now see rates surge to 38-65%. In response, U.S. apparel importers are seeking alternative sourcing options in countries with lower tariffs. However, many of these alternatives have higher production costs and often lack the required product ranges or production capacities.

Reshoring apparel manufacturing to the U.S. would also pose significant challenges. Labor costs are substantially higher, and many essential textiles for apparel production would still need to be imported—now at increased costs. Additionally, the U.S. faces a shortage of skilled workers in the apparel sector. Whether through higher tariffs on imports or costly domestic production, the outcome will be increased apparel prices, ultimately contributing to higher inflation.

Srinivasan further stated: "The trade policy pursued by the U.S. administration will disrupt textile and apparel supply chains, increasing uncertainty, and driving up prices. Rather than implementing unilateral tariff hikes across all product categories, it would be far more beneficial for the global textile and apparel industry if governments engaged in negotiations and collaborative policymaking" ■

BASF launches world's first commercial Loopamid Plant for sustainable textile recycling

BASF announced the start-up of the world's first commercial loopamid plant. The production facility at the Caojing site in Shanghai, China, has an annual capacity of 500 metric tons and marks an important step in the supply of sustainable products for the textile industry. "The startup of this plant once again demonstrates BASF's innovative strength," said Stephan Kothrade, Member of the Board of Executive Directors and Chief Technology Officer (CTO) of BASF SE. "As an integral part of our Winning Ways strategy, we utilize our chemistry to develop solutions for the biggest challenges of our time. loopamid transforms textile waste into a valuable resource, helps save raw materials and closes the textile loop."

loopamid is a recycled polyamide 6 that is entirely based on textile waste. The new production facility supports the growing demand for sustainable polyamide 6 fibers in the textile industry. "I am proud of our team, which has worked with great passion and dedication to achieve the commercialization of loopamid," said Ramkumar Dhruva, President of BASF's Monomers division. "The technology behind loopamid allows textile-to-textile recycling for polyamide 6 in a wide variety of fabric blends, including those with elastane. I am convinced that loopamid not only makes a significant contribution to the textile circular economy, but also helps our customers achieve their sustainability goals."

The plant as well as the quantities of loopamid produced are certified according to the Global Recycled Standard (GRS). This certification guarantees to consumers and textile manufacturers that loopamid is made from recycled materials and that the production processes comply with specific environmental and social criteria. In addition, first yarn manufacturers are successfully using loopamid.

To produce loopamid in its new plant, BASF currently utilizes industrial textile waste from textile manufacturing and will gradually increase the share of post-consumer waste. This feedstock includes cutting scraps, defective cuts, offcuts and other production textile waste from the textile industry. These materials are collected and provided to BASF by customers and partners. End-of-life garments made from polyamide 6 and other textile products can also be utilized for the production of loopamid. All these waste materials are challenging to recycle because they typically consist of a mixture of different fibers and materials as well as dyes and additives. Additionally, for post-consumer waste recycling, buttons, zippers and accessories must be removed in advance. BASF works closely with partners and customers to accelerate the development of collection and sorting systems ■

Kenya becomes Africa's largest importer of second-hand clothes

Kenya has emerged as the largest importer of second-hand clothes in Africa, earning the unfortunate distinction of being an easy dumping ground for used apparel while struggling to revive its collapsed textile industry. According to the latest trade data compiled by the United States-based Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), Kenya imported second-hand clothes and textiles worth Sh38.5 billion ($298 million) in 2023, making Kenya the continent's leading buyer of mitumba, the Kiswahili term for second-hand clothing, surpassing Nigeria at number four.

The imports represent a 12.45 per cent increase from Sh34.28 billion ($265 million) in 2022, as shipments of used garments continue to flood the Kenyan market, meeting the growing demand for affordable clothing. In 2023, Ghana ranked as the second-largest importer of second-hand clothes, with imports valued at Sh30.4 billion. South Africa followed at Sh29.4 billion, with Uganda at Sh27.2 billion, and Nigeria at Sh27 billion.

According to the report, Kenyan mitumba traders import various categories of second-hand clothes, including underwear, dresses, shirts, trousers, jackets, and shoes. Additionally, other used textiles such as bedding, towels, curtains, fabric scraps, and industrial rags also enter the country.

"I think we have not been intentional about growing the textile sector," Tobias Alando, Chief Executive Officer of the Kenya Association of Manufacturers, stated.

An analysis of MIT's Observatory of Economic Complexity indicates that in 2022, Kenya's imports of second-hand clothes and textiles were nearly equal to Nigeria's at Sh34.5 billion ($265 million), with South Africa ranking third at Sh33.76 billion ($261 million).

In 2021, South Africa was the leading importer of used clothes and textiles, though the country restricts such imports, except for specific purposes such as manufacturing industrial wiping rags or donating to registered charities. Despite Nigeria's official ban on the importation of used clothes, analysts note that they continue to be smuggled into the country from neighbouring regions.

Some officials in Kenya's Ministry of Trade, speaking anonymously, suggest that a large portion of Kenya's mitumba imports may be destined for neighbouring countries. "They are crossing the borders," said one official. Kenya's situation is further complicated by its reliance on the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA), a policy that grants eligible African nations duty-free access to the US market. To maintain AGOA privileges, particularly for textiles, Kenya must permit the importation of mitumba, a significant portion of which originates from the United States ■