



ISSN 2224-1817

Labour

21st Year, Issue-1, January-June 2018



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- There is no criterion for compensation in our labour law
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Trade Union

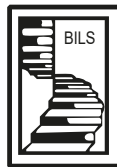
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(A BILS Journal)

January-June 2018



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(A BILS Journal)

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Printed by

SARCO Media Aid Services

85/1, Fakirapull, Dhaka-1000

Published by-

Bangladesh Institute of Labour Studies-BILS

House No- 20, Road No-11 (New), 32 (Old), Dhanmondi R/A, Dhaka-1209

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Editorial

Five years have elapsed after Rana Plaza tragedy. It was the deadliest garment factory disaster in history that not only stunned the entire nation, but also the world. The disaster left 1,136 garment factory workers dead and 2,400 others crippled. Because of the man-made calamity, entire Savar area was turned into a heap of corpses of people of all ages, castes and creeds who came to the town from their villages in search of their livelihoods.

A major change took place in the country's industrial sector after Rana plaza disaster. Compensating the dead and injured family members, imparting improved treatment to the injured and their rehabilitation, continuation of the programmes, implementing reforms in garment factories and gradual development of the sector, hike in labour wages, time-befitting revision of Bangladesh Labour Law, bringing perpetrators under trial following their arrest—all mentionable changes are considered to be the consequences of the disaster. The issue of accountability on the part of RMG owners after any industrial accident is quite visible now. At the same time, a positive change has come regarding affected workers' compensation.

Despite all these positive changes, there is no respite from industrial accidents where scores of workers die. No tangible changes have been brought in basic issues, including safety of workers at workplace, enhancement of workers' lifestyle, steps taken for prevention of accidents and providing compensation to affected workers. Still, workers are compelled to work beyond working hours, sheer indifference on the part of owners and all concerned, inability of affected workers and delay in delivery of justice—all the negative matters are tangible. The objective of this special issue is to highlight the progress achieved in last five years, lessons learnt from Rana Plaza tragedy alongside our achievements in overcoming the negative sides and our future planning for stoppage of recurrence of similar incidents.

We hope, this disaster in the garment industry will be an example for us forever and the educational aspects of this disaster will make the concerned people aware of their responsibilities.

We thank Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES), LO-FTF Council and Mondiaal FNV for their support and cooperation regarding publication of this journal.

Syed Sultan Uddin Ahmmed

Editor

The views expressed by the experts and the writers who wrote and gave interviews in this publication are reflections of their opinions; BILS Editorial Board has no liability in this regard

Academic Part

Economic Analysis of Tazreen Fashions Fire and Rana Plaza Collapse

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Nasibul Akter³, Md. Iftekhar Ashik Imran³

Abstract

Industrial accident in RMG sector has negative impact on the economy of Bangladesh. This study attempts to explore the economic consequences of Tazreen Fashions Fire and Rana Plaza Collapse to the stakeholders that includes employers, employees, bystanders, and government as a whole. Result of secondary data analysis shows that all the stakeholders are affected by the disasters. The result suggests that there are opportunities to exploit the scale economics in the RMG sector in Bangladesh. So, the industry should focus on increasing the productivity and maintaining profitability so that the laborers may be facilitated to attain a decent life. The study also emphasizes on economic and political stability, give importance on immediate need of a proper database of laborers and an effective and transparent governing body to oversee the industry as a whole.

Chapter 1: Introduction

Catching up developed countries is based on capital accumulation and rate of return to capital where developing and less developed countries have opportunities to explore the potentiality to increase productivity. This might be obstructed if appropriate measures on safety and welfare of labor force are overlooked. Market failure causes appropriation of property right where laborers suffer the most in the economy which is mainly based on labor intensive industries like Ready-Made Garments (RMG) in Bangladesh. The effect of externalities (e.g., industrial accident) on these industries entails colossal economic costs.

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Understanding and measuring of these costs and long run consequences of industrial disaster are necessary for policy formulation and macroeconomic stability (e.g., natural unemployment rate) of a country.

Industrial accident and fatality at work place occur worldwide. Studies in America (e.g., Wiatrowski and Janocha, 2014) emphasize on fatal work injuries. In Europe, different researches deal with causes (Harasymiuk and Barski, 2017; Haslam et al., 2005) and circumstances of accidents at work (European Commission, 2009), safety at work place (D'Ambra and Frenda, 2012). Like Europe, studies in Africa also attempt to delineate causes and improvement strategies (Umeokafor *et al.*, 2014). Types of occupational accidents in garments industries (Joseph, 2006) and factors behind of such accidents (Joseph, 2006; Chowdhury and Tanim, 2016) and occupational safety (Akhter *et al.*, 2010; Barua and Ansary, 2016) are studied in Asia. None the studies have considered the aspect of economic consequences of an accident in industry. Specifically, studies on Bangladesh's RMG sector are yet to address the economic consequences of disasters that had been taken place in the sector.

1.1. Motivation of the study

With the capacity of 6% of global clothing supplies, Bangladesh becomes the second largest Ready-Made Garments (RMG) exporting nation, trailing behind China, in the world. Over the course of the last 25 years, the ready-made garments industry in Bangladesh has grown from a total export value of USD⁴ 11.8255 billion in the fiscal year 1991-92 to a staggering USD 28.09416 billion, contributing as much as 82.01% of the nation's total exports as of the fiscal year of 2015-16 (EPB, 2017) and thus, directly contributes to over 12.7% of the GDP (Gross Domestic Product) of Bangladesh.

There are over 4,000 firms in the RMG industry in Bangladesh and together they employ over 4.5 million people directly. Indirectly the

⁴ US Dollar

industry helps in employing millions more in the transportation, shipping, housing, food and multiple other industries. The industry is considered generally highly robust as it showed exemplary resistance to the 2007-2008 global recession. All in all, the RMG industry is a vital component of the Bangladesh economy towards further prosperity.

The fact is that any and all threats towards to the RMG industry will have major consequences for the economy and overall well-being of Bangladesh. In the years 2012 and 2013, the industry quite literally came under fire following the incidents of Tazreen Fashions fire and Rana Plaza collapse. However, to what extent was the damage done and as a result of these two incidents have there been enough changes implemented to produce a long-term benefit for the economy as a whole require further investigation.

1.2. Background of the study

The Ready-Made Garments sector of Bangladesh has seen two major accidents in the form of the Tazreen Fashions fire and Rana Plaza collapse in the years 2012 and 2013 respectively.

On the night of 24th November 2012, a fire broke out from poorly and more importantly illegally stored large mounds of fabric and yarn (Manik and Yardley, 2012). The laws in Bangladesh at that time required such inventory to be store in a separate location with fire proof walls. The fire quickly spread throughout the eight-story building carrying with it smoke and toxic fumes. The building lacked properly wide indoor stairs, sprinkler systems and exterior staircases making escape of the 1,150 people, working on night of fire, extremely difficult to say the least. To make matters worse on certain floors mid-level managers prevented employees from escaping (Akash, 2017) and even ordering the workers to disregard the fire alarms and continue working (Chowdhury and Tanim, 2016). Some manager went as far as to block off exits. The aftermath of this incident was the confirmed death toll of 113 people and at least 172 people injured (Akash, 2017).

On the day of 24th April 2013, Bangladesh saw one of its worst incidents in recent history. A factory building collapsed outside Dhaka, killing more than 1,000 workers in the deadliest disaster in the history of the garment industry. There were multiple causes which lead to the loss of so many lives but primarily of these were because the building was constructed with substandard materials and in blatant disregard for building codes (Yardley, 2013).

1.3. Problem statement and objective of the study

Following these two significant incidents, the most significant cost was the cost of souls lost to the tragedies. Well over a thousand untimely deaths and thousands more injured or permanently disabled following the incidents. The maximum compensation that laborer can claim at the time of the Rana Plaza collapse was Tk. 1,00,000 and Tk. 1,25,000 for death and permanent total disablement, respectively. Group insurance allows laborer to claim that compensation in conformance to the amended Section 99 of the Labor Act, 2006. But, the RMG factories in Rana Plaza had not held group insurance for the laborers (Mannan, 2013). The prevailing insurance scheme covers only 20 laborers of a factory. As a result it has proved difficult for the right compensation to reach the hands of those who are entitled to it. Besides insurance premium, the prevailing labor law in Bangladesh does not allow laborers/worker to claim money damages including lost income, medical expenditures and death benefits. Further problems exist on the basis that there was and still isn't a universally accessible database of employees in the various firms in the RMG industry. As a result, following such incidents it proves very difficult to identify who are the rightful employees who deserve the compensations as well as who are still missing.

The average household size as of 2016 is 4.06 (BBS, 2016). And traditionally, a household generally has had one breadwinner for a household in Bangladesh. In recent times this is changing however, for the factory workers in the RMG industry, this is still the truth in most cases. On an average a single person working in one of the RMG

factories has to support the livelihoods for four. In the event of this single breadwinner becomes unable to work or loses their lives, the entire family will be left to fend for themselves, as there are no safety nets for them privately or publicly. And in most cases than not, these people do not have any place to return to explore their potential productivity. As a result, they are left helpless in the urban economy, losing out on all hope and ambition. Forced to fend for themselves, in all but a few cases education for young is halted and they enter into child labour. For girls in such cases, child marriage is a very likely result in addition to the halting of education, however, this can get much worse. With no one to provide for them in this harsh world, it is likely that they will turn to a life of crime or other illegal professions.

There are also lacking of good governance overall in terms of afore mentioned lost families as well as the industry as a whole. Such lacking leads to an overall negative impression to our international trade partners, leading them to think the industry as a whole is not proactive to employ women reducing the vulnerability of young girls and poverty. Adding to this, exemplary punishment has not been handed out to the people for whose oversight such disasters were allowed to happen. There is also a lack of an effective and efficient governing body who will oversee the thousands of factories maintain international standard. Therefore, the objective of the study is to explore the economic consequences of these two key incidents to the stakeholders and economy of Bangladesh.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Understanding of economic costs of accident has significance in social, laborers, factory and bystander aspects. Accidents of laborers incur costs of approximately 55 billion euros in European Union (EU) in 2004 (Eurostat, (2004). Around 6.9 million people (3.2% of the workforce) in the EU have got accidents at work in 2010 (Eurostat, 2010). The nexus between incident of accident and productivity is indisputable. Higher the number of accident lowers the level of competitiveness. Evidently data show that accidents entail cost of

around 4% of the global GDP (International Labor Organization, 2006).

In case of laborers, an accident results loss of life, leads to disability, suffering and generates onerous situation to his/her family. It also increase physical incapability and decrease income of laborers (European Commission, 2011). As a consequence of accident, factories have to bear the production and capital loss; and increase contributions to insurance premiums (European Commission, 2011). Industrial accidents have physical and psychological effects on bystanders (e.g., individuals and business entities). Such affects may have devastating and long term negative consequences on bystanders and their families. Such accidents have both social and economic perspectives. Because of technical (lack of data) and organizational (low political power of health and safety department and of knowledge on the topic) constraints (Rikhardsson and Impgaard, 2004), economic aspect of accident costs is difficult to evaluate (Jallon, Imbeau and de Marcellis-Warin, 2011).

Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1. Data Collection and Analysis Technique:

Both primary and secondary data were collected and analyzed in the study. Secondary data were collected from different national and international news outlets and Ministries of Bangladesh Government.

A mix of national and international news outlets have been considered to avoid national biases in conducting the study.

Some government institutions of the People's Republic of Bangladesh such as the Export Promotion Bureau of Bangladesh needed to be considered as they have the most detailed outline of the exports of the RMG industry of all the readily available materials.

Data on the average corporate tax rates and the source taxes over the years have been gathered from interviews of employees working in different RMG factories.

3.2. Limitation of the research methodology

The research has been conducted mostly based on secondary data and as such majority of the analysis stems from the secondary data sources. If there is a deviation in reality and the readily available data, it has been glossed over in the research.

Lack of readily available reliable data is a prime limitation of the study. There was a lack of available data on the effects following the incident and follow-ups only annually and in each instance the focus of the follow up seemed to change. There also missing data for niche subjects to an entire fiscal year's particular data, further affecting the deduced results. The sample size of the research is to some extent limited as information could be gathered from a few selected sources.

In some instances, there is self-reported data, which can be susceptible to biased information. Also, the information may be inaccurate to a certain degree affecting the results derived from the self-reported data.

Chapter 4: Results and Discussion

4.1: Effects on Exports Earnings

Table 1 shows that the growth of the RMG sector in terms of both shares of exports as well as total value. In 1991, the RMG sector has brought in 1182.55 million USD while making up 59.31% of the total export revenue of Bangladesh. As of 2016, the total revenue of the RMG sector has raised to 28094.16 million USD and now contributes 82.01% of the total export revenue of Bangladesh.

Table 1: RMG Sector Values and Percentage of Total Exports.

Fiscal Year	Total export (USD Million)	Exports of RMG	
		Value (USD Millions)	Share (%)
1991-92	1993.92	1182.55	59.31
1992-93	2382.89	1445.03	60.64
1993-94	2533.90	1555.78	61.40
1994-95	3472.56	2228.35	64.17
1995-96	3882.42	2547.13	65.61

1996-97	4418.28	3001.24	67.93
1997-98	5161.20	3783.64	73.31
1998-99	5312.86	4020.23	75.67
1999-00	5752.20	4352.39	75.66
2000-01	6467.30	4860.56	75.16
2001-02	5986.09	4583.89	76.58
2002-03	6548.44	4912.10	75.01
2003-04	7602.99	15686.09	74.78
2004-05	8654.52	6417.67	74.15
2005-06	10526.16	7900.80	75.06
2006-07	12177.86	9211.23	75.64
2007-08	14110.08	10699.80	75.82
2008-09	15565.19	12347.77	79.33
2009-10	16204.65	12496.72	77.12
2010-11	22928.22	17914.46	78.13
2011-12	24301.90	19089.73	78.55
2012-13	27027.36	21515.73	79.61
2013-14	30186.62	24491.88	81.13
2014-15	31208.94	25491.40	81.67
2015-16	34257.18	28094.16	82.01

Source: EPB, 2017 (Export Statistics Book 2015-2016. Export Promotion Bureau of Bangladesh.)

From the historical data of 25 years (Table-1) the growth rates for the RMG sector has been calculated in terms of both USD and BDT⁵. The exchange rate values used for the calculations are shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Dollar Rate during 1991-1992 to 2015-2016.

Fiscal Year	Taka Per USD
1991-1992	38.07
1992-1993	38.85
1993-1994	39.85
1994-1995	40.11
1995-1996	40.90
1996-1997	42.58
1997-1998	45.37
1998-1999	47.98

⁵ Bangladeshi Taka

1999-2000	50.10
2000-2001	53.90
2001-2002	57.41
2002-2003	57.90
2003-2004	58.96
2004-2005	61.51
2005-2006	67.21
2006-2007	69.06
2007-2008	68.60
2008-2009	68.80
2009-2010	69.18
2010-2011	71.17
2011-2012	79.10
2012-2013	79.93
2013-2014	77.72
2014-2015	77.67
2015-2016	78.26

Source: EPB, 2017 (Export Statistics Book 2015-2016. Export Promotion Bureau of Bangladesh.)

The vast historical data has been narrowed down to the time frame of interest of 2012 to 2016 following the two unfortunate incidents. This is shown in Table 3. If the growth rate of the RMG industry was considered in terms of the US Dollar then it is observed that the growth rate has been increasing from 6.56% in 2012 to 13.83% in 2014. However, when considering the exchange rate and doing the same calculations in BDT, the growth rate decreases from 18.43% in 2012 to 10.69% in 2014. This growth rate discrepancy could be a consequence of the large change in the exchange rate in the fiscal year of 2011-2012 at 1USD=79.10BDT from the previous fiscal year of 2010-2011 at 1USD=71.17BDT (Table 3). The RMG industry saw a rather significant growth in terms of growth rate in BDT due to the extra earnings that incurs from BDT depreciation. As the exchange rate stabilized and prices were renegotiated, the growth rate stabilizes and synchronizes to the USD growth rate.

Table 3: RMG Sector Values in USD and BDT along with their Respective Growth Rates. (2010-2016)

Fiscal Year	Total export (millions USD)	Exports of RMG				
		Value (millions USD)	Growth Rate for USD (%)	Taka Per US\$	Value (millions BDT)	Growth Rate for BDT (%)
2010-11	22928.22	17914.46		71.17	1274972.12	
2011-12	24301.90	19089.73	6.56	79.10	1509997.64	18.43
2012-13	27027.36	21515.73	12.71	79.93	1719752.30	13.89
2013-14	30186.62	24491.88	13.83	77.72	1903508.91	10.69
2014-15	31208.94	25491.40	4.08	77.67	1979917.04	4.01
2015-16	34257.18	28094.16	10.21	78.26	2198648.96	11.05

Source: EPB, 2017 (Export Statistics Book 2015-2016. Export Promotion Bureau of Bangladesh.)

While general wisdom states that the firms in the industry lost out on orders following the incidents of Tazreen Fashions and Rana Plaza, the data of total RMG exports and their corresponding growth rates suggest otherwise. Up on further investigation, it was learned that most firms were forced to run at 50% to 75% of their total capacity in the fiscal year of 2013-2014. However, this still does not explain why the total exports went up if the firms were in operation at below their capacity. The probable reason behind this is that new firms have entered into the industry increasing the overall total capacity of the RMG sector. It reveals that RMG sector in Bangladesh is yet to achieve economies of scale and economic efficiency. The sector has potential to increase total revenue and decrease cost in the long run.

The world needs affordable apparel, thus it could not afford the RMG sector in Bangladesh to shrink or wind down. As a result, the major clients of Bangladeshi apparel agreed to support the industry with orders as much possible given that real steps are taken to improve the work conditions and safety of the firms. Referring to the tables 4 and 5, it can be seen that these promises were followed upon.

Table 4: Export Performance of Bangladeshi Knit Production and Major Importing Countries (Million USD) (Fiscal years of 2009-10 to 2013-14)

Country	2009-10	2010-11	2011-12	2012-13	2013-14
Germany	1282.77	2022.05	2039.97	2168.13	2573.70
UK	725.74	990.98	1103.30	1259.84	1335.25
USA	891.61	1119.04	1013.95	1130.90	1197.85
France	692.00	999.71	855.18	892.45	964.27
Spain	384.55	595.72	660.73	702.90	856.28
Italy	379.04	525.17	571.46	554.94	731.91
Canada	283.86	432.92	401.82	461.97	445.10
Netherlands	528.57	591.07	325.28	246.77	385.48
Belgium	155.79	299.74	320.46	317.19	440.63
Denmark	178.24	256.32	318.72	375.62	450.71

Source: EPB, 2017 (Export Statistics Book 2015-2016. Export Promotion Bureau of Bangladesh.16)

Table 5: Country-wise Comparative Statistics of RMG Export (Million USD) (2015-2016 fiscal year.

Countries	April-June15	July-Sep15	Oct-Dec15	Jan-March16	April-June16	Yearly Growth (%)
USA	1494.97	1436.20	1377.40	1338.00	1473.32	-1.45
Germany	1076.40	1083.85	1080.29	1248.48	1240.51	15.25
UK	812.61	798.38	818.43	986.67	920.30	13.25
France	492.14	333.37	453.33	393.69	533.92	8.49
Spain	452.13	414.96	436.00	495.08	518.00	14.57
Italy	342.40	282.65	323.18	304.56	367.68	7.38
Belgium	188.90	186.13	186.63	226.51	236.06	24.97
Netherlands	151.07	148.78	160.76	184.17	165.84	9.78
Canada	270.32	255.24	215.67	246.62	280.91	3.92
Sub-Total	5280.94	4939.56	5051.69	5423.78	5736.54	8.63
Others	1584.18	1499.67	1644.76	2080.62	1717.54	8.42
Total	6865.12	6439.23	6696.45	7504.40	7454.08	8.58

Source: EPB, 2017 (Export Statistics Book 2015-2016. Export Promotion Bureau of Bangladesh.)

In summary, the revenues for the firms in the RMG industry did not fall significantly neither was there any significant increase in revenues for firms which did not have very high compliance standards.

4.2: Effect on the Costs of Industry

4.2.1: Wages

The RMG sector of Bangladesh is highly labor intensive making up anywhere from 60% to 70% of the total expense incurred by a firm in the RMG sector of Bangladesh. Under the minimum wage guidance set by the government of Bangladesh in the year 2013, there are 8 grades of worker in any given RMG firm. However, in the case of most firms the majority of the labor force, primarily the laborers with the job of working on the lines assembling apparels, falls from grade 3 to grade 7 whereas grade 8 consists of trainees. Over 50% of the workforce falls in the grades 5 and 6.

Table 6: Pay grades for labors in the RMG sector from the year 2013 till present.

Grade	General Job Description	Total to be paid (BDT)
1	Pattern master, Chief quality controller, Chief cutting master, Chief mechanic.	13,000
2	Senior Mechanic, Senior Electrician, Cutting master.	10,900
3	Sample section, Mechanic, Senior member of machine operators and cutters and similar departments.	6,805
4	All highly skilled machine operators and similar posts.	6,420
5	Junior machine operators and similar posts.	6,042
6	General machine operators and similar posts.	5,678
7	Assistance machine operators and similar posts.	5,300
8	Trainees	4,180

Source: Bangladesh Labour Law, S.R.O no. 369 law/ 2013

As it is observed in Table 6, the different pay scales have been in effect since 2013. Because of the hike in wages, the overall total costs for the firms in the industry had increased significantly. Prior to the 2013 pay grade laborers were roughly paid the following wages for the respective grades:

Grade 3 – 4218 BDT
Grade 4 – 3861 BDT
Grade 5 – 3553 BDT
Grade 6 – 3322 BDT
Grade 7 – 3000 BDT

Comparing the pay slabs both prior to and following 2013, all grades have seen an average of 70% increase in wages across the board. As a result, the most significant cost of the RMG sector within a year has increased by 70% while the sales revenue increase was struggling at around 10% on average. Laborers have paid more than the minimum wage in locations having with a comparatively lower supply of skilled or semi-skilled laborers. It has been seen that in such locations employers have been forced to pay over 6,500BDT to the grade 6 laborers in order to retain them. Another reason for paying higher wages is the firms applying the conservative principle in business, where they are paying a lower grades higher wages to avoid another future shock increase in costs as was seen between 2012 and 2013 when the new minimum wages were announced.

The RMG industry is facing prospects of another increase in wages. Union leaders have asked for minimum wage to be risen from the current 5,300 BDT to 16,000 BDT (Document Cloud, 2018). While there is a need for increasing the minimum wage due to rising cost of living, the amount being demanded could be detrimental to the workers. The workers may be forced to work to an unhealthy extend to earn these wages or risk losing their jobs due to downsizing. If the proposed changes are made to the minimum wages the cost for firms in the RMG would at the least double overnight. Based on historical data, the buyers of the garments will not be willing to pay double for the goods, as a result the firms might be left on the verge of insolvency or have to drastically cut their human labor force, replacing it with automation via robots.

4.2.2: Meeting compliance

Factories which did not meet the standards set by the Bangladesh National Building Code (BNBC), had to undergo extensive and swift renovation phase in order to meet the compliances set by Accord and Alliance. While costs varied extensively from factory to factory depending on their individual shortcomings, the level of investments

required ranged from around 50,000,000 BDT to 200,000,000 BDT. The primary component of this was having a modern and effective sprinkler system along with other essential first response firefighting equipment. However, it is to be noted that not all factories paid equally for meeting the compliance measures. The firms who were the first to purchase the equipment needed paid significantly more than firms who waited a year or more to start procuring the required equipment. For example, in late 2013, a single quality blast door cost around the 100,000 BDT mark. The same door could be bought in late 2014 to early 2015 for less than half of its original price. It has been estimated that well over 1 billion USD has been spend in improving workplace safety and meeting compliance standards as of mid 2017 (Mirdha, 2017).

It was suggested at the time of formation of Accord that the organization in partnership with the foreign buyers would provide financial aids to the firms with factories who supplied them goods to improve their working conditions. However, upon further investigation it has been found that most firms were not made such explicit offers and those who got the offers were forced to decline due to high trade-offs. While the offers for aid were supposed to be a sign of goodwill between the business organizations to help the firms who really need the funds to make major changes, more often than not it has been found that the buyers used these as bargaining chips to get lower prices from the local producers. Also, as previously mentioned the factories at the time were running below their maximum capacity, the buyers threaten to move their business to other firms when pressed by their former supplier firms for financial aid. As a result, very few were able to avail the financial aid.

4.2.3: The Governance

Following the Tazreen Fashions fire the government and its regulatory bodies pointed less blame on the below standards factory conditions and more on the basis of a deliberate case of arson. The then home minister pointed at possibilities to of other competing firms performing

arson to reduce the competing capability of Tazreen Fashions. However, the claims could not be verified till date. At the time of the incident the rule for compensation for disabled workers and workers losing their lives, was at just 125,000 BDT and 100,000 BDT respectively. In the case of the Rana Plaza collapse the government took drastic action, where the government not only provided aid to the best of its abilities but also went out to arrange for means to avoid such tragedies ever again in the future. At first the government was not entirely sure as to whether allowing for foreign meddling would be good for the nation. However, the government overwhelmingly decided that such a disaster cannot be allowed to happen again in the future. This shift in attitudes brought about the Accord and the Alliance with the Government of Bangladesh being a part of these organizations and allowing for a safe and healthy RMG garment industry. The government still to date is supporting these organizations as well as training and developing the national authorities to take over on a moment's notice to maintain and further improve the working conditions of the factories of Bangladesh when the Accord⁶ and the Alliance⁷ expire and leave the country.

⁶ *The Accord on Fire and Building Safety in Bangladesh (the Accord) was signed on May 15th 2013. It is a five-year independent, legally binding agreement between global brands and retailers and trade unions designed to build a safe and healthy Bangladeshi Ready Made Garment (RMG) Industry. The agreement was created in the immediate aftermath of the Rana Plaza building collapse that led to the death of more than 1100 people and injured more than 2000. In June 2013, an implementation plan was agreed leading to the incorporation of the Bangladesh Accord Foundation in the Netherlands in October 2013.* (Available from <http://bangladeshaccord.org/about/> , Accessed on 10th July, 2018)

⁷ *The Alliance for Bangladesh Worker Safety (Alliance) is a legally binding, five-year commitment to improve safety in Bangladeshi ready-made garment (RMG) factories. The Alliance was organized in 2013 through the Bipartisan Policy Center with discussions convened and chaired by former U.S. Senate Majority Leader George Mitchell (D-ME) and former U.S. Senator Olympia Snowe (R-ME), both of whom have a strong track record of forging consensus-oriented solutions. The collaborative process involved apparel industry companies and stakeholders including: the U.S. and Bangladeshi governments, policymakers, NGOs, members of civil society, and organized labor.* (Available from <http://www.bangladeshworkersafety.org/who-we-are/about-the-alliance> , Accessed on 10th July, 2018)

4.2.4: Taxation

The following Table consists of data on the corporate tax rates and source tax rate for the RMG industry in Bangladesh through the fiscal years.

Table 7: Corporate and source tax rates (2012-2015).

Fiscal Year	Corporate Tax Rate (%)	Source Tax Rate ⁸ (%)
2012-13	10	0.8
2013-14	10	0.7
2014-15	20	0.3
2015-16	20	0.6

Source: Interviews conducted by the Authors in 2018.

Information in Table 7 reveals that there were hardly any incentives provided by the government in the form of tax cuts at the least, following the tragedies to boost the RMG.

4.2.5: The Workers

Table 8: Number of injured and deaths in the incidents of Tazreen Fashions fire and Rana Plaza collapse.

Incident Name	Injured	Deaths
Tazreen Fashions Fire	172	113
Rana Plaza Collapse	2,432	1,136
Total	2,604	1,249

It is without a doubt a great tragedy for the over 1200 people who lost their lives and the over 2600 people injured in the disasters of the Tazreen Fashions fire and the Rana Plaza collapse. The breakdown showed in Table 8 is conservative estimates. The compensation provided to them were less than adequate for reasons ranging from the global garment buying brands' reluctance to pay compensations to the people who supplied them to the red tape regarding the indexing and distribution of the compensations. In many cases, it has been seen that

⁸ Source Tax as defined by GOVERNMENT OF THE PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF BANGLADESH NATIONAL BOARD OF REVENUE INCOME TAX MANUAL, Ins, by F.O. 1985 subsequently omitted by Ordinance No. XXXVI of 1985, dated 20/07/1985 w. e. f 01/07/1985 Tax payable under this ordinance shall be deducted or collected at source in respect of the income derived on account of supply of goods, execution of contracts or services rendered.

people had been forced to wait over 2 years to get the compensation as per government instructions. However, having gotten the compensation the people were not out of the water for they had to take small loans till the time of receiving compensations for their survival and had racked up huge interests. Hence, most of the money gained from the compensation years late, was used in paying back those loans and the subsequent interests. A vast number of the survivors of these tragedies are traumatized and unable to work again even at one fourth of their previous productivity, making it near impossible for them to earn a respectable livelihood (Preetha, 2017).

However, every cloud has a silver lining. Following the tragedies, the joint effort of the global brands, retailers, the government of Bangladesh, the firms in the RMG sector and trade unions have allowed for workers in the RMG sector to have better work environments than ever before. Also, the conditions keep on improving little by little as more knowledge and equipment for the safety of the workers are becoming readily available. The minimum wage for the workers had been greatly redesigned and increased to allow them a respectable pay for their work. Vast quantities of safety measures in the form of firefighting equipment, first aid, doctors, daycare facilities, access to clean water and clean washrooms have now been made available. All in all, the industry is moving forward to better the lives of its workers one step at a time and there is no going back for there are watchful eyes of multiple parties monitoring the industry now and are actively trying to prevent any wrong doings to the best of their abilities.

4.2.6: Compensations

Following the loss of life and livelihood, the subject matter comes towards giving adequate compensation to the ones harmed. This list is not just limited to the ones working in the factories when the disasters happened but also the innocent bystanders and other structures around the incident zones. Unsurprisingly and rather sadly, it has been found that the bystanders are ever able to make a proper claim for damages let alone get adequate compensation for those said damages.

As for the employees harmed, the situation is only slightly better. Most employee rosters are kept in-house and paper form. And following such incidents all data is usually lost. This makes finding out who are the employees and who of them need to be given the lawful

compensation is very hard to determine. As a result, even if the compensation is allotted justly, the process can take weeks of not months leading to prolonged suffering of the ones affected in the meantime. To add to this, prior to The Accord and The Alliance it was not common practice to maintain a fund within the organization primarily to pay compensation to the ones harmed in the workplace. Further problems in providing lawful compensation stems from factories not having insurance to insurance companies not paying as the terms of the insurance were very limited and loopholes could be easily exploited (Rahman, 2013).

Factory owners bear capital loss as the insurance policy was very specific to fire exposure and did not cover building collapse. In Rana Plaza collapse, two garment factories, namely New Wave Bottoms and New Wave Style, had lost 140-150 million BDT (Rahman, 2013).

Then there is the general unwillingness to pay out as in the case of Walmart following the Tazreen Fashions factory fire. It was agreed upon by past buyers from Tazreen to form a fund and contribute to it for covering the medical costs of the people harmed in the fire. While most of the other buyers paid, Tazreen Fashion's biggest customer did not contribute to the fund. However, all is not lost for in the similar circumstances, Walmart was pressured into pledging to pay for the victims of Rana Plaza collapse but there are fears as to the pledge remaining as a pledge and not be fulfilled (Document Cloud, 2015).

While large funds were mobilized for a few of the people affected, it can be argued that it was all for the optics. Such allegations are backed up by the statics that while initially a few families were given compensation, for all those who applied for it to get the amount it took two years in the case of Rana Plaza victims even though all stakeholders seemed to be in high gear trying to better things initially (Hoskins, 2015).

In case of "lawful compensation", the amount allocated for the victims are 100,000 BDT and for a permanently disabled worker and 125,000 BDT regardless of the worker's basic wage, financial conditions and family dependencies (Chandan, 2017). The amount in general seems very low when thought of keeping in mind that the person used to fund the livelihoods of at least three more individuals.

Having said all that there is some light at the end of tunnel, more and more firms are now contributing to a general welfare fund. The idea

behind it is that in the future people do not have to go uncompensated following a tragedy. They will not be forced to live on a day to day basis or on credit only to lose what little they might have left. The size of the welfare fund stood more than 2,000,000,000BDT after implementation of the amended labor law, which was only 4,200,000BDT before the Rana Plaza incident (Document Cloud, 2017).

Chapter 5: Conclusion and Recommendations

5.1: Conclusion

RMG is the highest contributor in terms of both gross and net export earnings. Comparing with other items in Bangladesh, the contribution of RMG in national export earnings is more than 82%. It has seen its worst days in between late 2012 and mid 2013. Thousands of lives were lost and thousands more injured. However, the wakeup call did not fall on deaf ears. Considerable changes were made to the industry with the combined effort of all stakeholder better working conditions and assure no future tragedy takes place.

There are substantial costs for providing the right wages and facilities to the workers yet it has been upheld as per guidelines. There are opportunities to exploit the scale economics in the RMG sector in Bangladesh. So, the industry should focus on increasing the productivity and maintaining profitability as to assure profit margin do not shrink due to unfair prices from buyers. A shrinking profit margin will lead to producers looking to cut cost which will automatically lead to the backtracking of the wages and facilities provided to the workers of the industry, rendering all the work put into the betterment of the industry since 2013 as futile.

5.2: Recommendations

1. The steps that are being taken to ensure a safe and healthy work environment in the factories of the RMG industry should be monitored and kept an ongoing process as to not allow any such future tragedies.
2. The benefits and wages of the workers need to be kept respectable allowing them to have a decent life. This can further motivate them to improve their productivity thus, being a help for all the stakeholders.
3. Economic and political stability needs to be maintained as much as possible. The RMG industry is already running on low margins, especially the comparatively smaller firms. An economic shock could

force them to look for ways to cut cost. Cost cutting and lead to a fall in employee welfare spending or downsizing leading to all the effort that has been put in all parties to improve the industry over the last few years fruitless.

4. A proper database of employees needs to be maintained which will be readily accessible by authorized bodies allowing for easy count and listing of employees in the event of an unfortunate incident. Thus, getting rid of the guessing game and streamlining the compensation handling process.
5. An effective and transparent governing body should be established comprising of various stakeholders such as representatives of labor unions, representatives of ministries related to the RMG industry, factory owners, foreign buyer representatives and similar stakeholders can be picked for the board of the said governing body. The goal of this organization would be to take over from where the Accord and the Alliance have gotten to now while monitoring the current developments and encouraging further developments. This allows for the economy to further maintain its sovereignty diminishing any and all possible threats due to foreign influences' possible manipulation of the industry.
6. There is a need for worker development fund allowing for current and future workers to be trained more extensively in all aspects, allowing them to improve their productivity. An increased productivity will not only lead to them being able to earn more but the economy will also benefit in the long run.

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Civil Society

People of Bangladesh were main driving force during Rana Plaza salvage operation

An exclusive interview with Lieutenant General Chowdhury Hasan Sarwardy, Bir Bikram

Just after Rana Plaza tragedy, Bangladesh Army alongside ordinary people embarked on a salvage operation. In this salvage operation, one of the challenges in the sphere of workplace accidents, the then GOC of Ninth Infantry Division and incumbent Commandant of National Defence College Lieutenant General Chowdhury Hasan Sarwardy, Bir Bikram, SBP, BSP, NDC, PSC, PhD played the most leading role. At every step, taking risk of life and overcoming challenges, he pushed forward the salvage operation alongside general people. After five years of Rana Plaza collapse, he recalled his experience of the 20-day breadth-taking salvage operation, including workers' treatment, compensation and rehabilitation activities. Rashed Ahmed took the interview.

Question: Rana Plaza is undoubtedly a name of a major building collapse. On 24 April 2013, over 1,100 workers lost their lives on this spot where the salvage operation was conducted under your able guidance. After guiding such a major salvage operation what is your experience?

Chowdhury Hasan Sarwardy: I have sincerely borne in my heart the ideals and thoughts of Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and tried to act accordingly. What he said about armed forces: “You belong to people, people belong to you. You don’t belong to a different race. Your families are run by their taxes.” I have tried to materialize his saying throughout 40 years of my employment career, including Rana Plaza salvage operation period.

Being inspired by this philosophy, I have expressed my solidarity with the affected ordinary people to salvage their mothers, sons and daughters as well as brothers and sisters from under the rubbles. Always I thought that I am one of them and my dear and near ones

might be there. This is why, both my activity and beliefs got mixed with people's thoughts and I have worked taking people with me.

Probably, you have seen that a large number of machineries were installed during salvage operation. But, in fact, the people who physically worked for salvaging these injured and dead people, came from general mass. Beginning from food they contributed money, donated blood and supplied medicine. On behalf of army, I simply coordinated with them. For this reason, a successful salvage operation has been possible after Rana Plaza collapse. And its main driving force was entire people of Bangladesh.

Question: During salvage operation, what kind of opposition or hurdle you have to face? How did you tackle it?

Chowdhury Hasan Sarwardy: There were many hurdles. Actually, we had no preparedness for tackling this kind of disaster. Still, we have been able to finish the salvage operation successfully by dint of our sincere efforts. But afterwards, several individuals and organisations became jealous at my work that I understood from their behavior. They were engaged in spreading false propaganda through leaflets and speeches for stopping the salvage operation. Despite the facts, I carried on my task, because media was my greatest strength. Through this operation, my faith in media that I cherished since 1971 got strengthened much more. Media was in my favour, media was in favour of the salvage operation, media was in favour of general people. It was not in favour of any individual, party or organisation. Both national and international media helped me by supplying true information. This is why, I got an opportunity to work with transparency and smoothly. It might create an indiscipline in the entire state if true information could not be supplied through media.

Question: During salvage operation, what particular incident kept a permanent impression in your mind?

Chowdhury Hasan Sarwardy: During salvage operation at ruined Rana Plaza factories, I have observed that workers were kept confined by keeping them inside factories under lock and key. As a result, they could not come out of the factories. As workers could not come out of factories, we got 400/500 dead bodies of workers on the stairs beside the gate. In a bid to save themselves, they embraced each other, but

they were unable to save themselves. What a terrible heart-breaking scene, can you imagine?

Question: During Rana Plaza accident, there was no preparedness. After Rana Plaza incident, how much do you think factory safety measures improved in our industrial sector? If not done then what was the reason behind it?

Chowdhury Hasan Sarwardy: Rana Plaza lacked adequate safety measures-it was true, but it is still a truth that many factories lack safety measures till now. Safety measures improved in some export-oriented industrial organisations, but these should also be ensured in hundreds of factories located inside houses, markets and residential areas. How much factory atmosphere and safety improved that should be determined by the owners arranging for doing various tests taking workers in confidence with them, not merely by the comments passed by brands and clients.

Safety of life must be guaranteed by 100 percent. There is no scope for ensuring safety by 70 percent and keeping 30 percent unsafe. If workplace remains unsafe then it is harmful to both the owners and the workers. So, it is essential to make all factories hundred percent safe.

Question: After Rana Plaza accident, what do you think that how much Bangladesh is prepared to tackle this big disaster? What should be done on our part?

Chowdhury Hasan Sarwardy: Our preparedness for combating disaster is mainly for flood, tornado, and cyclone etcetera. I think more studies should be conducted for landslide, earthquake and incidents of major building collapse. School, college and university students should be taught about these subjects, mass awareness should be created and general people should be involved with the activities and all should work together. But, I don't think that the government alone will have to work everything. This work can be done by non-government organisations or through government and non-government joint partnership. If any accident occurs in any disaster-prone area then we should draw our attention towards the place of treatment of the injured, their safe shifting and how to bear their expenses. It requires prior planning. If all garment industries were located at a single location, if each garment factory had its own treatment system/hospital then

workers could avail of treatment facilities not only during disaster period, but in other periods too. This would have helped tackle disasters during emergency periods. In my opinion, each industry or group should have at least a 50-bed hospital of its own.

Question: After the salvage operation, a compensation determination committee was formed under your guidance through courts. There we saw that as soon as the committee gave a proposal, BGMEA promptly dissented to the proposal.

Chowdhury Hasan Sarwardy: It is a reality that I had to stumble time and again due to BGMEA's constant opposition while I worked for salvaging the affected workers and while determining workers' compensations. There were also renowned persons who were involved in this activity. After calculation, they determined compensations, but BGMEA expressed their discord. BGMEA gave us examples of labour law which is most heart-breaking. So, I have to mention that existing labour law is in no way worker-friendly. It preserves the interest of owners, not of the workers. This is because, the owners have BGMEA, but the workers have no such organisation. So, there should be an arrangement so that there exists member or director quota in BGMEA that may be taken from the workers. Workers are the actual owners of mills as they are responsible for production while banks are money suppliers. There must be representations from workers who will speak for workers. Owners will never speak for workers' interests.

Regarding BGMEA, I must tell that it should be formed collectively by owners-workers. It is an owner-worker organisation, not only meant for owners. Thinking interests of workers, there should be at least 40% representation from workers in BGMEA management committee. This organisation should not be owner-centered or merely for profit-mongering; rather it should be production-oriented and worker-friendly.

Question: Actually, what lessons have we learnt after Rana Plaza disaster? How much did we turn around after the tragedy?

Chowdhury Hasan Sarwardy: At that time, we succeeded to make world conscience understand that we are sincere enough regarding workers' issues. We had many promises. One of the promises was to ensure safe workplace for workers. It was also promised that there will

be a central database for workers so that in case of an accident all information about the employed workers may be preserved there. But much of them remained undone.

If owners cannot come out of their mentality of being mere owners then no good deed is expected from them. And BGMEA is a very strong organisation and some of the owners' relatives are ministers while some others' relatives are either government/high civil/military officers. They are closely related to them who run the state machinery. These mill owners belong to exploiters' class. They themselves take decisions and compel the government to implement the decisions. This is because, they are major donors to various political parties. Most of the political parties are run by their money. For this reason, pressure was created from different quarters so that I stop the salvage operation. But, I carried on my work overcoming all pressures.

Political will is a must to work for the interest of workers. Whether I go to power or not I want to work for the country and its people—this intention is most essential. My entire thoughts should be people's welfare-oriented, not for making any certain group happy. And now it is pre-election period. It is time to see the promises of the political parties about what they want to do for the country, for welfare of people and workers. Without political will nothing is possible as the country is under their control.

Question: What were the flaws of workers regarding realisation of compensations?

Chowdhury Hasan Sarwardy: Because of lack of proper unions in factories, workers' demands could reach nowhere. Factory owners protect their interests through BGMEA, but workers are being deprived. They are unable to realize their demands going against BGMEA. BGMEA is much more powerful.

Question: What is your opinion about the amount of compensations of dead or injured workers?

Chowdhury Hasan Sarwardy: Because of various reasons, a factory owner's or industrialist's money is spent unnecessarily. By decreasing unnecessary expenditures, if the money was spent for improvement of

standard of living of workers then it would have been much better. Apparel sector is the most competitive sector across the globe. For its sustenance and improvement, I believe that it is important to improve the standard of living of workers. But the competitions have reached to such an extent that we think that lesser amount we pay to our workers the more we earn profits. Then the possibilities of sustenance in international markets will be much bigger. But I believe, success will be much bigger if the business is managed through maintenance of a healthy owner-worker relationship. Success in garment sector depends upon the amount spent for workers' welfare, not for profits. To tell about Rana Plaza or Tazreen Garments incidents, I have seen the opposite picture which is totally inhuman. Of course, workers' compensations should be determined keeping in mind living and economic conditions of contemporary period. I think we should follow international standard in this regard.

Standard of garment factories much better now but nothing to be complacent

Fire Service DG tells at an exclusive interview

Brigadier General (Retired) Ali Ahammed Khan took charge of the Bangladesh Fire Service and Civil Defense as its Director General (DG) just two months before the Rana Plaza tragedy. Just after taking over, he had to face such a major accident with great skill. Five years after the tragedy, Ali Ahammed Khan spoke in detail about the improvements made on the issue of industrial safety and improvements in factory standard. A significant part of his interview is given below. S. M. Alamgir took the interview.

Question: Fire Service and Civil Defense had to play an important role in the rescue operation after the dreadful incident. Being the DG of Fire Service, you observed everything very closely. Five years after the incident, how do you recall it?

Ali Ahammed Khan: Rana Plaza collapse is a heart-rending event. It's very unfortunate and we don't want its repetition. But, it's a learning for us. Because, garment industry of the country has undergone a radical change during post-Rana Plaza period. Ministries of labour, commerce and industries and departments of Bangladesh government have taken the issue with much importance in a bid to bring improvement in the sector. The government has taken many steps in this regard. Specially, considerable progress has been made over issues like workplace safety, occupational safety, building safety and electronic safety. For the purpose, national action plan has been formulated through which inspection is being done in each garment factory. Besides, foreign buyers' alliance, Accord and Alliance are working for improvement of standard of garment factories. Not only that capability and capacity of fire service and electricity department as well as other departments have been increased. Of them, I want to tell about improvements made in fire service department. The number of fire stations in industrial areas increased. In each garment factory, fire inspection and fire training activities increased. In each garment factory there exists fire safety plan which is under regular observation. So, I think, five years

after Rana Plaza collapse, working atmosphere in garment sector, security system and government activities have been brought to a standard stage.

Question: In your opinion, what are the places do you think where improvements need to be done?

Ali Ahammed Khan: Still I am not fully satisfied. Many garment factories have been closed where working condition needs to be improved. For example, there are many garment factories which operate on sub-contract basis. These factories are located in congested areas where roads are also not so wide. In case of an accident, it's very tough for fire brigade vehicles to enter the area. Moreover, there are many readymade garment factories (RMG) where owners are yet to implement fire safety plan. Much improvement should be done in these areas. As Rana Plaza collapse is an 'eye opener,' I like to tell that lots of improvement have been done, but there is still lacking. Rapid improvement must be done over there. Many RMG factories have been closed where working condition did not improve. In some cases, time has been given. These factories are located in certain areas. A building needs fire, electrical and structural safety. There are many owners who have ensured fire and electrical safety but, they did not ensure building safety. Enough money is required for the purpose. Because of financial crisis, many factory owners are unable to ensure building safety. We have, of course, recommended for their loan on easy term. But the major achievement is that after Rana Plaza disaster awareness increased to a great extent among RMG owners and at various government departments as well as at all stages.

Question: Fire stations are seldom established in industrial areas. Is there any step on the part of yourself or that of government? Can industry owners take any initiative in this regard?

Ali Ahammed Khan: If fire incident occurs anywhere, it spreads rapidly from smaller to larger areas. So, arrangements should be made so that fire may be extinguished quickly. Above all, it is required to increase adequate fire stations. Still, the number of fire station is inadequate in comparison with requirements. Hopefully, the government has taken an initiative to increase fire stations. In the meantime, work on acquiring lands already started. It has been planned

to set up nine new fire stations in the areas where garment factories are located. Five fire stations will be set up in Dhaka city while two others will be set up in Chittagong area. Proposals will be given in ECNEC for allotment of land. But no government initiative is sufficient. Industry owners must come forward too. They, at their own initiatives, can set up mini fire stations at zone wise. Moreover, mini fire brigade can also be set up under public-private partnership. Because if fire incident occurs at any industry or factory, it spreads in large areas if fire-fighting vehicles come from distant places. If there exists industrial area-based fire stations, fire fighters can arrive at the spot quickly. Fire can also be brought under control within a short period. Moreover, if fire station is located in industrial area, not only fire can be extinguished, but regular trainings can also be imparted to workers of existing industries and local residents. There is no substitute to increasing fire stations. The government has taken an initiative to set up fire station at every Thana and separate fire station at special economic zone. On our behalf, a proposal was given to RMG owners in this regard, but they did not respond positively.

Question: You were talking about awareness of industry owners. Being an organisation of the owners, BGMEA always plays an important role. Do you think that BGMEA owners have become more conscious about their responsibilities during last five years?

Ali Ahammed Khan: I think that awareness of garment owners and BGMEA leaders increased while comparing with previous years. But still many garment owners think that the amount which they spend for ensuring factory safety is not their investments.

But, it must be ragged as investment. While building new factories, RMG owners are now using steel structures. Risks at buildings of steel structure is much higher. So, they should have to build these types of buildings giving much importance and following the official rules. Buildings should be built, specially maintaining fire code and all other codes.

Question: Reform activities are going on in garment factories. Do you think that all equipment, including fire extinguishing equipment, are being installed maintaining the required standard? Because, if standard equipment is not ensured then risk exists although reforms are done.

Ali Ahammed Khan: During inspection we found that most of the equipment, including fire-fighting equipment, has been installed caring little for standard. Reform activities are done with products of inferior quality. Chinese products of inferior quality are specially used for the work. Following import, their quality control is not done properly. BSTI is the quality control authority while in other parts of the world it is done by the fire service department. Arrangements should be made for establishing factories by maintaining quality control of all products, including fire extinguisher and fire pump. If any equipment of low quality is installed then it doesn't work during fire incidents. Then situation goes beyond control. So, we'll bring it under government notice. I've talked to the secretary of home affairs over the issue. Besides, I've placed the matter during inter-ministerial meeting. We'll call them who import these items. We will want to know from them about their standard. An ad hoc team is being formed from fire service department to examine the products in the markets regularly. Team members will collect fire equipment from markets for scrutiny. We'll conduct a survey regarding the issue and later, we'll submit a report to the government.

The ceiling for compensation in Bangladesh Labour Law is not sufficient.

Dr. Mojtaba Kazazi

The Rana Plaza Donor Trust Fund collected contributions to ensure that all the families of victims and the survivors of Rana Plaza receive the financial support they need to cover loss of income and medical costs. Dr. Mojtaba Kazazi was the Chief Commissioner and in charge of ensuring all the claims are processed and the compensation paid. After five years of the disaster, he remembered his observation and experience through an interview. The interview was taken by Md. Yousuf Al-Mamun.

Question: After five years of the Rana Plaza Tragedy, some observers are saying, victims did not get compensation properly because of absence of a benchmark. What is your evaluation from the experiences of RPCA?

Dr. Mojtaba Kazazi: The benchmark that was used for the level of compensation was the system envisaged in the ILO Convention 121 as an international standard. Convention 121, which has not been ratified by Bangladesh, provides a much higher amounts than the Bangladesh Labour law that has a limited ceiling. However, the main criteriain Convention 121is the salary of the injured or deceased worker, and unfortunately the salaries of garment workers in Bangladesh are generally low. Therefore, the initial results of the calculations werelow.

Two important steps were taken to address this problem and increase the results:

First, the base salaries of all the workers were adjusted upward for inflation.

Second, minimum amounts were agreed on between the RPCA and local members of the Coordination Committee for payment to the families of the deceased and to the injured workers. These minimums were higher for the deceased, and for the injured were proportionate to the level of injuries.

Consequently, in cases where the calculation on the basis of the ILO Convention 121 resulted in amounts lower than the agreed minimums, they were increased accordingly.

Question: Do you think the effort was given at the right time in case of starting compensation process? What kind of factors and challenges were involved in this process?

Dr. Mojtaba Kazazi: Comparing with other situations, the efforts for setting up a scheme and a Trust Fund started relatively early after the Rana Plaza collapse. A main challenge was to set up a program with solid legal foundations that would provide quick payments to victims through payments from the global brands, in a manner that would not discourage brands on legal concerns from contribution to the Trust Fund. Another challenge was to run an international program in Bangladesh, without being deprived from the support and valuable assistance of the Bangladesh Government. Finally, logistical and financial challenges to put together and train a specialized team, design claim form and a tailor-made software, arrange for office space, currency accounts, etc. in a short span of time and initially without access to funding and under doubts on whether the program will take off.

Question: Do you think the amount of compensation was standard in Bangladesh context? In this case, what is your evaluation about injured workers?

Dr. Mojtaba Kazazi: As mentioned, the ceiling for compensation provided in Bangladesh Labour Law is low and not sufficient.

For the injured workers, in addition to the minimum lump-sum amounts paid to them, a new Trust is set up to provide them free long term medical care. This is in addition to the BRAC substantive medical and support program for Rana Plaza seriously injured workers with USD 1 million funding from RPCA resources. Also advice was provided to workers –in fact through BILS, which graciously assisted in many other areas as well- on how to better invest or use their funds. In spite of all that, since the payments were provided as a lump-sum, some of the injured workers may have run out of money quickly and need help, which I hope they will receive through local organizations.

Question: Being an expert with 30 years of experience in international dispute resolution, how do you analyze the effort of RPCA and what are the points of success and failure from your point of view?

Dr. Mojtaba Kazazi: Seeing in the context, RPCA was a collective international and national effort and a successful one. Modelled on the United Nations Compensation Commission, RPCA was set up and

processed claims correctly and fast. It managed to raise sufficient funds and made full payments for all its awards. It conducted its business with the consensus of its international Coordination Committee, which included the Government. RPCA awards were signed and certified by an eminent panel of Commissioners, including a former Chief Justice of Bangladesh, and ended with a full independent audit of its financing and all payments. At the same time, payments could not be made in one go and had to be staggered as funds were not available, and this also created additional administrative tasks and work.

Question: What should be our lesson learning from Rana Plaza and how should we address such challenges in future?

Dr. Mojtaba Kazazi: This was an unprecedented effort and there were many lessons learned. Among them: avoid payment to victims from multiple sources without coordination, the need for a good registration system for the identity of the workers and their records, managing the expectation of the victims, etc.

The main lesson however in my view is the need to have an established system for payment of work injury accidents that works in all cases properly and by default, and eliminates the need for ad hoc firefighting efforts.

It is important to note that the experience of RPCA and the lessons learned there are already used successfully in other similar programs, including in Tazreen Claims Administration program in Bangladesh, and Ali enterprise program in Pakistan.

Bangladesh garment workers' training: Problems and prospects

Dr. Mahfuzul Haque

Rana Plaza collapse of 2013 tremendously shook not only Bangladesh, but also the entire world. Deaths of so many people in a single incident disturbed the world. This has brought forward the issue of garment workers' professional health and security. Rana Plaza tragedy did not occur suddenly. Workers apprehended it earlier and many of them were unwilling to enter the factory. As workers were disorganised and there was no trade union or participating committee in factories, they had no "voice" of their own. Earlier in 2012, one hundred and twelve workers died in Tazreen Fashion fire. Because of collapse of Spectrum Garments, 64 workers died in 2005. Till now, a large number of workers lost their lives and became crippled due to factory fire, building collapse and their rush for coming downstairs out of fear. After the accidents, owners, buyers and brands involved in apparel sector woke up from slumber. Brands/buyers are responsible for overseeing workers' welfare. In trade union (TU-workers' voice) activities, participating committee's election, committee members' training, ensuring workers' professional health and security, their appointment, working hours, job loss, holiday, wages and other issues are resolved in an urgent manner. Brands/buyers/ TU body's "Ethical Trading Initiative (ETI) has come forward to conduct trainings.

So, we should learn about ETI. ETI is an organization of brands/buyers of Denmark, Britain and Norway, TU federation, human rights organization and an organization of NGOs that works for welfare of workers around the globe. ETI is mainly working for launching Social Dialogue for the welfare of workers in Bangladesh apparel sector. It is ETI's responsibility to impart necessary training for launching Social Dialogue in factories that are primarily involved with brands. Being a member of participating committee, training should include knowledge on rights and responsibilities, improvement of skill and outlook, sound knowledge on labour law and rules and regulations, professional health and safety-related matters and above all ability to play an effective role in running factories properly. During training, special emphasis is given on importance of Social Dialogue for smooth running of factories. Naturally, it is a common query: What is Social Dialogue?

ILO's definition of Social Dialogue is: Discussions with owners, workers and government for suggestions, understanding, agreement and exchange of information. It may be bilateral or tripartite. Its aim is to help increase mutual trust and understanding as well as cooperation among the owners and the workers. Moreover, it also aims to address important socio-economic issues, initiating good governance and bringing peace and development in industry. In a sense, it aims to create a healthy relationship between workers and owners through Social Dialogue and making relentless efforts for improvement and expansion of factory.

In a bid to expand Social Dialogue in each factory or organization that consists of at least 50 workers, it is mandatory to form a participating committee. In 2013, Bangladesh Labour Law-2006 was amended where it was mentioned that representatives of workers' participating committees may carry out workers' welfare-oriented activities at the organisations where trade union does not exist. Although participating committees are no alternatives to trade unions, still it has been observed that readymade garment (RMG) factory owners are encouraging to form the committees. ETI has already extended its hands of cooperation in this regard.

In clause 206 of Bangladesh Labour Law 2006, there is detailed description of the committee activities. There it has been mentioned that under its preview, efforts should be made for raising mutual understanding, trust and cooperation among the owners and the workers for ensuring labour law practices and encouraging discipline; security; professional health protection and finding ways to improve the working condition.

As proper democratic movement is absent in Bangladesh for a decade, TU activities have come to a standstill. Virtually, there are no TU activities as union elections are not held. Whatever exists that too is under control of labour organisations belonging to ruling party. Because of lack of proper labour movement, owners have opined for formation of participating committees instead of trade unions. As there is binding of law and indirect pressure from brands and foreign clients, export-oriented factories are forming participating committees. Primarily, it has been observed that these committees are formed consisting of people nominated by the owners. This happens due to lack of election.

In Bangladesh, ETI was launched in 2014. Besides training of garment workers, ETI plays an important role in participating committee elections. ETI-imparted training is done step by step. Primarily, a four-day training course is conducted for elected workers of participating committee, provided it was earlier discussed between factory owners and brands. This is followed by a three-day training course for factory managers and welfare officers. Moreover, trainings are also conducted for supervisors and vice-chairmen.

During training, importance is given on following subjects: Aims and objectives of participating committee; knowledge, skill and improvement in outlook; sound knowledge of labour law; knowledge of application of factory rules and regulations and establishing a link between manager and workers. It is often noticed that workers are not aware about matters relating to holiday, wage, working hour, code of conduct, punishment and suspension. Specially, female workers are not aware about the welfare facilities during childbirth, entitlement of holidays, advantages and payment procedures. As a result, they become victims of deprivation. While conducting ETI training, a two-day training course is held for female workers of PC. After training, their opinions are preserved on evaluation forms which later helps a lot in updating training manuals.

Besides ETI, trainings are conducted in ILO and brand-owned institutions. Because of lack of uniformity in training manuals, it is not possible to conduct proper trainings. However, brands are more interested in imparting training on prevention of fire and matters relating to building safety. Brands are less interested to respond to matters like payment of minimum wage, granting entitled holiday, working hours, overtime, rest, breakfast, canteen facilities, and welfare activities for pregnant mothers et cetera. In many cases it has been observed that workers have to toil hard in an inhuman manner for days together in a bid to catch shipment. But, brands/buyers show indifference to their sufferings.

Following Rana Plaza and Tazreen disasters, pressures were created on brands/buyers, but they did not do their job taking it seriously. Prices of Bangladeshi apparel are comparatively cheaper than that of other countries. As a result, workers become victims of constant deprivation. The training that is conducted by buyer organisations—Accord and Alliance—is mainly used for the purpose of building safety and fire prevention. A few owners commented that they have to spend a lot of

money to buy a door from abroad for prevention of fire as per brands' formula. Two organisations of Bangladesh government such as Department of Inspection for Factories and Establishments (DIFE) and Labour Directorate are working for application of labour law. Its responsibility is reposed on the two organisations to make workers aware about labour law, conduct trainings of participating committee, giving female workers clear conception on welfare facilities during pregnancy period, entitlement of holidays, wage, trade union, subjects relating to professional health and security. But it is unfortunate that due to manpower shortage and lack of proper guidance as well as lack incentives, the two organizations are unable to conduct necessary trainings. So, workers are not getting clear conception about their duties and responsibilities as well as rights.

However, BGMEA, the organization of garment owners, has understood that there is no alternative to training. As 85% of 40 lakh garment workers are female workers, it is essential to undertake welfare-oriented activities for them. For this reason, Social Dialogue is very essential which is workers' own voice. If Social Dialogue can be launched then labour problems can be resolved easily thereby increasing productivity and decreasing labour migration.

Initially, a few conservative owners thought that if workers take trainings then they will become shrewd and will involve themselves in destructive activities. Later, they could come to a realization that their concept was wrong. Rather, through trainings on rules and regulations, workers will be able to understand their duties and responsibilities alongside their rights. After such realisation, they are now sending workers for participating in various trainings conducted by ETI, ILO and brands. If participating committee members are trained then they will be able to guide remaining workers properly. As a result, workers will keep themselves away from destructive activities.

In this regard, the importance of the two government organisations alongside brand/buyer is immense. Lion's share of responsibilities is done by the Department of Inspection for Factories and Establishments (DIFE).

By increasing its manpower, arrangements should be made for conducting more training. It is essential to strengthen the Directorate through correct leadership and motivation. There exists industry related institute (IRI) that deals with issues like labour law, labour rules, professional health protection, holiday and entitlement of wage. The

aforementioned institute should be strengthened by increasing its manpower. If necessary, the government may give additional responsibility to training institutes in private sector through a gazette notification. There are organisations who are interested in conducting training courses and they may be utilized properly.

We must remember that labour law has been formulated for the interest of both the owners and the workers as well as for the greater interest of the country's overall development. Call for implementation of labour law should come from inside the country, not from any foreign organisation. Concerned labour organisations should take initiatives in this regard. Till now, brands/buyers are engaged in merely profit-mongering competitions. As to why, prices of Bangladeshi apparels are the lowest across the world. This results in poor wages of workers. After Rana Plaza, Tazreen accidents, buyers/brands became aware about the issue. But, alongside building and fire security, they should take into cognizance issues like wages of workers, working hour, holiday and female workers welfare facilities during childbirth. If at the cost of blood of Rana Plaza collapse and Tazreen fire victims, issues like workers' training, their professional health and security as well as wages, working hours and holidays can be resolved then and only then tributes will be paid to the victims.

The writer is former secretary, Ministry of Labour and Employment, Government of Bangladesh.

Rana Plaza tragedy is a major learning for us

Atiqul Islam

During Rana Plaza tragedy, Atiqul Islam was the president of Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA), one of the organisations of the entrepreneurs of readymade garment (RMG) industry in Bangladesh. He observed the disaster very closely. As a representative of RMG owners, he was involved in everything from rescue operation to treatment, compensation, rehabilitation, Brand-Buyer-Retailer and facing global market challenges. Considering this, he gained a practical experience and acquired sense of deep observation. In the light of all the experiences, he has highlighted different aspects of Rana Plaza tragedy, a major learning for the owners of Bangladesh RMG industry. SM Alamgir took the interview.

Question: On 24 April, five years ago, Rana Plaza collapsed. The event sent shockwaves around the globe. From the disaster, the RMG owners learnt what sort of learning?

Atiqul Islam: First of all, I pray for the salvation of the departed souls of the workers who were killed in the disaster. At the same time, I express my sympathy to the families of the victims who were killed or injured in the disaster. I think Rana Plaza tragedy is a major learning for us. From this tragedy, RMG owners learnt most--how to ensure workers' safety. Besides, after the disaster many steps have been taken regarding workplace safety and workers' safety. In a bid to ensure the safety, Accord-Alliance, the alliance of European and American buyers, are working to ensure the safety. Abiding by the conditions set by them, the factories that have brought reforms, only they can survive in business. Those who cannot bring reforms, they will not be able to survive in the long run. Therefore, I want to make it clear that after the Rana Plaza collapse we have given much importance on workplace safety of workers. Simultaneously, we have given emphasis on dignity and welfare of workers.

After Rana Plaza tragedy, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina is keeping a close watch on every sector. After the disaster, we have worked together according to her instructions. After facing a disaster like Rana Plaza collapse, Bangladesh government, NGOs, buyers, BGMEA, BKMEA, BTMA and Employers' Federation all worked together and

we are now moving forward. Following the disaster, the garment factories that have grown anew, they first give priority on safety and the factories which fail to ensure safety, they are not getting licenses.

Industrial disaster happened in many countries around the world. In 1921, a major industrial disaster occurred in Manhattan, USA. After 26 years of the incident, the government of the country implemented the labour law over there. However, in our country, a new labour law was implemented within merely 90 days of Rana Plaza collapse. Because of intense desire of government and combined efforts of industry owners and leaders of industrial organisations, we have improved working atmosphere to a great extent which is a rare example in the world. After Rana Plaza tragedy, we have shown in action, not in words. Industrial owners have kept their commitments. Now is the time for buyer organisations to come forward. Industrial owners and buyer organisations will have to work together.

Question: After Rana Plaza collapse what are the activities done in the interest of workers during last five years?

Atiqul Islam: After Rana Plaza collapse, a new labour law was enacted. In 2013, workers' salaries were increased through formation of minimum wage board. In the ongoing year, again a minimum wage board has been formed in a bid to raise salaries of workers. Probably, the salaries of RMG workers will increase by 2018. Moreover, this has been incorporated in the new labour law that basic pay of workers will increase at the rate of its five percent annually. This has been implemented in every factory. Even in many factories, the rate of increment is seven to 10 percent. This was missing in the previous labour law. Moreover, during my tenure as president of BGMEA, a fund was created for welfare of workers by depositing money at the rate of 0.03 percent, which is a unique example in the history of Bangladesh. During formation of the fund, many owners did not agree to the proposal. Hopefully, an amount of Tk 25 to 30 crores have been deposited at the fund. With more export earning, the deposit in fund will increase proportionately. I think it to be an epoch-making step. In the meantime, compensations were given to the families of dead and injured workers from this fund. Now, if a worker dies in an accident, an amount of Tk 2 lakh is being paid to his/her family from insurance and Tk 3 lakh from this fund.

Question: Till now, the financial matters have been discussed. What about steps taken for ensuring workers' safety in workplace?

Atiqul Islam: In this sphere, I shall tell that workers' safety has been ensured. In every factory, fire door, fire safety, safety alarm and all the requirements have been fulfilled. The factories which worked under the supervision of Accord-Alliance, they were turned into single fire units. The accessories of a fire brigade unit have already been installed in the garment factories. Moreover, Accord-Alliance will not give the 'no-objection certificate' until and unless a factory is equipped like that of a fire brigade unit. Not only safety measures have been strengthened, but also a number of green factories flourished across the country during post-Rana Plaza collapse period. While comparing pre-Rana Plaza collapse period before 2013 with 2018, I think that what was not possible in 20 years it has been done in last five years. However, to make the arrangement sustainable by following the steps, time has come for buyers to come forward. I think the buyer organisations can play a much better role in this regard.

Moreover, now maternal leave is being given to female workers at every garment factory. In each factory job cards are also given to workers. Steps have been taken for welfare of workers in every factory. I think these are major achievements in this sector.

Question: It was a major accident that sent shockwaves around the globe. After Rana Plaza collapse, Bangladesh faced an image crisis. Do you think it has been overcome in last five years?

Atiqul Islam: After Rana Plaza tragedy, five years have elapsed. During the period, Bangladesh government and business organisations like BGMEA, BKMEA and BTMA worked together. We have shown that not only in words, but in deeds. After Rana Plaza collapse, foreign buyers wanted safety in factories. Through Accord-Alliance, we have done it. So, I think that because of our initiatives, the image of the country and that of its RMG industry has been restored. Buyers have taken our steps positively and their confidence on the country's market has been restored.

Messages have already gone abroad that after five years of Rana Plaza collapse, garment workers in Bangladesh now work in an ideal atmosphere while their handsome salaries as well as their dignity have also been ensured. Because of improvement in working condition, Bangladesh has become a role model in the world.

Question: It is a major industrial accident. Being an industrial entrepreneur, how did this incident stir your mind?

Atiqul Islam: I think it is the most pathetic incident. It cannot be accepted normally. However, as it is an accident, I think we have to learn many things from this incident. Industry owners have become conscious enough so that quick steps can be taken instead of negligence when any fault is detected. We shall have to remember that nobody has the right to play with the lives of workers. Workers' safety must get priority--this we have learnt from Rana Plaza accident. As we have learnt from the past mistakes, we have welcomed Accord-Alliance at a higher cost. I think it is because of wide scale initiatives, no major accident occurred after the Rana Plaza incident.

Question: After Rana Plaza collapse do you think the steps taken by the government in last five years is adequate enough?

Atiqul Islam: I think, after the accident the government too like industry owners extended its hands of cooperation to its best. Still, BGMEA leaders are working in close coordination with the government for enhancement of the standard of garment industry. As far as I know, the government is providing all kinds of cooperation in this regard. However, I think the government must have to come forward for enhancement of the standard of RMG factories, which are not under the fold of Accord-Alliance. Under a national action plan, database should be created in those factories in a bid to improve the security system over there. Otherwise, if any mishap occurs in those factories then its consequence will have to be borne by the entire industry.

Question: Dead and injured families of workers of Rana Plaza have been given financial compensations. Do you think it adequate enough? What else more should have to be done for them?

Atiqul Islam: I think the families of victims and injured workers of Rana Plaza got adequate compensation. At that time, a Commission was formed for their compensation. This was led by a justice. The Commission worked independently and gave compensation to the affected families.

Question: Many injured workers need long-term treatment. Now nobody bothers to take care of them. Do you think there is nothing to do for them?

Atiqul Islam: You see BGMEA has taken responsibility of studies of 21 children of dead workers of Rana Plaza tragedy. Their cost will be borne till attainment of 18 years of their age. We do not want that any

worker's family remain in distress. Still we always try to remain beside them according to our resources. The incumbent Board of BGMEA is also working in this regard.

Question: In a bid to enhance the standard of living of 45 lakh workers of this industry what more steps are being taken by RMG owners?

Atiqul Islam: In the meantime, minimum wage board has been formed to raise the standard of living of garment workers. However, what I think is that alongside enhancement of standard of living of workers, RMG owners too must have to survive. The biggest challenge in implementation of revised wages is that prices of apparel are not higher. It has become tough for us to run the industry and repayment of interests of bank loans with the amount that is paid to us by buyers. There exists a wide disparity in earning per minute and cost per minute. Until and unless this disparity is minimized, RMG industry will face a tough challenge in the coming days. Therefore, it is imperative that purchasing prices of apparel be increased by buyer organisations in a bid to raise the standard of living of workers.

There is no criterion for compensation in our labour law

Barrister Sara Hossain

Being a human rights activist and a lawyer, Barrister Sara Hossain is relentlessly working for establishing rights of working people and at the same time advocating their causes. In 2005, she was particularly engaged in a legal battle for workers during Spectrum Sweater Factory collapse where 64 workers lost their lives. After Rana Plaza disaster, she along with other lawyers jointly filed a writ petition in court to identify the culprits and bring them under legal coverage. Fariba Tabassum has taken this interview to learn about her experience and opinion during post-Rana Plaza collapse period.

Question: After so many years of Rana Plaza collapse, culprits could be brought to justice, which is termed as a major failure. What are the reasons behind stand stillness of the trial?

Barrister Sara Hossain: There are several aspects of the trial. In case of Rana Plaza, each of the cases has different aspects. One is criminal justice system where cases were filed as for example Sohel Rana and other garment owners were arrested and the cases were transferred into murder cases under clause 304/302. These cases are still under trial. Charges were framed against them. But testimony of witnesses is yet to be taken. Although five years already elapsed, but still testimony of witnesses was not taken. This is a major problem. But, Sohel Rana was not granted bail during last five years. However, one thing I should tell that such a case has been alive for a long period which is really praiseworthy. Earlier, in case of Spectrum or other cases, the owners came out of jail on bail. And charges are yet to be framed in the cases. This is a major issue. But, why the trial procedure has been stalled after coming to this stage? Why the witnesses are not examined, why the trial is not progressing?

Secondly, another type of case remains pending with Labour Court. Same situation prevails there.

Thirdly, another person filed a case in civil court claiming his compensation. As far as I know the court is yet to issue summon in the case. It means the trial is yet to start.

Fourthly, there are other types of cases that was with the High Court in public interest. There are some issues. One of them relates to realization of compensation from Soheli Rana, garment owners and other authorities such as RAJUK, Pourasabha (municipality) who have responsibilities for overseeing safety during construction of building. The case is still under trial in court. Alongside there are other matters relating to role of industrial police—all these are under trial. Still, everything is going on.

It is really commendable that courts have taken positive and unprecedented steps in criminal cases, filed for the interest of public. Because, if cases were not filed for the interest of public then it would not have been possible to arrest Soheli Rana. He almost crossed the border. It had been possible to arrest him thereby starting criminal cases against him. But, we started facing problems afterward. The problems are to some extent administrative. We have filed cases with the High Court, but the court where the case was proceeding there it was stopped and the honourable judge who was looking after the case do not turn up. Because, he has been transferred to another court. Availability of new court and getting time from court—all are major problems. As to why, the cases are not progressing.

About the cases which were filed in public interest, I can tell that I have seen that at the outset, courts used to play a positive role. Sometimes, officials of various banks are coming to court or the people to whom the owners of the five garment factories owe money, they too are coming to get back their money back from frozen bank accounts. But court told that they had preserved the money for the purpose of compensation. In this case, the role of court is positive. Court has kept the land of Rana Plaza under own control so that it may utilize its money as well as the amount that has been deposited on their accounts for compensation purpose. But there is a problem that is till now the matter still remains unresolved.

However, it is true that Soheli Rana has spent five years in jail. On the other hand, if we consider the matter of compensation then it is true that we did not get compensation from court, but a large number of people got compensations from Trust Fund that has been created at the initiative of international community. But, compensation is one kind of

accountability. The person who is responsible for disaster, he/she should have to pay the amount. But, in reality it did not happen.

Question: As per court order, Tk 15 lakh was determined as compensation, but the matter got stuck. What should be done for its acceleration?

Barrister Sara Hossain: For its acceleration, court hearing is essential. We should take initiatives in this regard. We are accustomed to facing problems like court holidays are nearing as to why this cannot be done, that cannot be done. We have been trapped in such a circle.

Proper steps should be taken in this regard. Trade union or various labour organizations that speak for affected families, they should collectively take initiatives in court about the cases. Then and only then it will be fruitful. We have filed cases on behalf of BLAST and Ain o Salish Kendro. But, if trade union or labour organizations join us to raise a demand that a solution to the issue should come then its permanent solution is possible.

Question: Prevailing situation at that period and after five years (as for example, legal framework, forceful sending of workers to factories, delay in salvage work, DNA test) in your opinion to what extent the procedure has been changed?

Barrister Sara Hossain: Regarding safety in factory, we have made considerable progress. In case of building construction, many initiatives have been taken regarding building safety. Many activities have been done in this regard both nationally and internationally. Accord-Alliance is working, inspection system has improved much than that of previous period. Inspection procedure has been strengthened. Framework has also been determined. I think we have moved forward to a great extent. This is because, no major disaster like Rana Plaza happened in Bangladesh earlier.

Security strengthened considerably in readymade garment sector (RMG), but not that much in other sector. The incident of Tampaco where 39 workers lost their lives is not so serious in comparison to Rana Plaza incident. Despite the fact, death of 39 workers is loss of many lives. We are telling that we are now a developing country, but death of 39 people in a developing country is a major question. In reality, we are not developing as to why we got rid of these events. Presently, I believe our attitude will be changed.

Many people learnt many things from Rana Plaza. As for example, in disaster management many volunteers went there to take part in salvage operation. Now, many of them are rushing to Rohingya camps. This is not that we merely depend on administration.

Because of Rana Plaza, the matter of DNA test has been settled. It also happened during Tampaco incident. System has been changed to a great extent. Considering all, I think we have done much improvement in other issues except the issue of compensation. Because of Trust Fund, special compensation increased by three times. But, no change has come in law. In case of Tampaco, a change has come. Owners have deposited Tk one lakh in court. They are also giving additional money outside court. They are taking advance steps to prevent people from going to court. An awareness has come in the mindset of owners. They have become more responsible than ever before.

On the other side, we have seen that steps have been taken in Rana Plaza. We should understand clearly what losses people have incurred and filling up the losses. People who have three children they should send them to school. Their expenditure should be borne by the authorities concerned till attainment of their age of 18 years. Steps should be taken to find out the expenditure, but nobody is doing the job. Still, owners are providing a little amount to victims' families.

Question: In Rana Plaza, there were many discrepancies regarding compensation. There was no standard of compensation. Nobody got compensation as per requirement. Of same kind of victims, one got Tk one lakh while the other one got Tk 15 lakh. Such was discrepancy.

Barrister Sara Hossain: There was a criterion for loss of single hand or loss of both hands. Many people got money from various sources. As for example, firstly, they got money from private source, then from Prime Minister's Fund and later from Trust Fund. There were certain procedures. One was that distributions were done as per individual whim like that of Rohingyas. Many banks donated money to Prime Minister's Relief Fund. In fact, many donations were made, but I am not aware about the exact amount that was donated to anybody.

I myself and Shahdeen Malik tried through Right to Information Act for three to four times about the amount that had been distributed and about the number of beneficiaries of the fund.

Then came big voluntary Trust Fund where everyone donated money from where a certain amount was also distributed. The money was

distributed from this Fund based on a criterion of loss. We did a legal assessment. CRP did a medical assessment. Then after calculation, it was reviewed through lawyers. Then it went to panel consisting of Advocate Sultana Kamal and honourable Justice Khairul Haque. Now, it should be examined if someone got much more than others.

I shall tell another thing. It is about deficiency while doing calculation of compensation. In our labour law, there is no criterion for compensation. After getting Tk One lakh, someone may claim more. It is a common practice that we don't want to go to court. Receiving that one lakh taka, we also hand it over. Court is also not habituated beyond this amount. In fact, owners are giving the amount to console the workers. They are not calculating the actual loss and the amount of the exact cost of living. Even, our labour welfare fund too does not calculate in this manner. At the same time, we had some other cases in our hands such as Catherine Masud's case and now a case is underway centering US-Bangla. In these cases, courts again started calculating actual losses. After Rana Plaza incident, nationally we came to know for the first time that losses can be calculated in this manner. After doing this major exercise, why don't we incorporate it with law—this is a major question. On the occasion of completion of five years of Rana Plaza tragedy, I think if we could give approval for changes in law then and only then we could pay tributes to the victims of the worst-ever industrial disaster of the country in a befitting manner. Tributes can be paid by constructing monument, but if we could incorporate the matter in law then it could be beneficial in future.

There is another issue while calculating the compensation. An amount should be determined by multiplying the exact amount of income of the bread earner and his/her longevity. How many children he/she left behind, their living requirements and dependents of the deceased—all should be calculated to find a criterion.

There is another ground that we call “Pain and Sufferings” or “Pain and Emotional Loss” which is beyond calculation that my husband or my mother passed away and it cannot be recovered in exchange of Tk 05 crore or 20 crore. But, there court has to play a role that it may determine an amount through probability. There is an argument that it is also a loss. Although it cannot be filled up by money, but compensation is usually done by money. Therefore, it should be done through financial calculation. As a result, loser gets compensation and on the other side the matter is reposed on the person because of whom

the loss has been made. While compensating, there may be discrimination, but emotional Loss is not the same thing. For death of someone's mother, he/she will get a certain amount of compensation while another person is also entitled to get the same amount of compensation for death of his/her mother.

There was an issue regarding the subject what we expected from the cases that we filed in the interest of public that something fruitful will come out ultimately. A committee consisting of experts recommended for compensation at Tk Five lakh, but BGMEA raised an objection saying it won't agree to it. On this issue, no directive came from court. I think it is also that more important. Court should tell that all have incurred 'Emotional Loss.' Therefore, at least Tk Five lakh should be compensated, because the loss cannot be recovered by even compensating Tk Five crore to each individual. Another issue remains beyond law that could have come to light. We could not pursue the court. An amendment is being brought in labour law. There too this proposal is not being considered.

Finally, there is a recommendation from certain quarters that an arrangement for insurance can be made. The issues are coming in such a manner that garments being a globalized industry are a profitable one. So, there will be a separate insurance scheme for garment and leather industry. Factory owners will implement the scheme. It means every worker will have an insurance policy. Arrangements for insurance will be ensured for entire workers and owners will pay a certain amount to it. In case of dangerous incidents, workers will get money from the respective insurance company. In case of loss, workers will claim to owners and owners will inform the matter to the insurance company. In the process, workers will get entire amount that is payable to them. It is being practiced around the globe. In India too it is a regular practice. But in our country, there is a difference. It is in fact like scoring one-sided goal by the owners. Because, an owner knows it does not matter for continuation of a case for 20 or 50 years. And workers will die, their family members will face the same fate, but they won't get money.

Journey towards a universal Employment Injury Insurance System

Noushin Shafinaz Shah
Steve Needham

The collapses of Rana Plaza in April 2013 saw over 1,100 workers lose their lives and a large number suffer serious injury. The tragedy left many deeply vulnerable. Injured workers required medical treatment and could often not return to work. Meanwhile, dependents of the deceased found themselves struggling to support children or elderly relatives.

In response, a major effort took place involving government, employers and workers organizations, civil society, international brands and retailers as well as the International Labour Organization (ILO) to provide compensation to those who needed it in line with ILO Convention 121 on workplace injury.

By late 2015, over USD 30 million had been paid out in respect of some 5,000 claims. Yet while the effort to compensate Rana Plaza victims was a success, it also highlighted the huge challenge and complexity of responding to such an incident as a one-off effort.

Employers in Bangladesh are already required by the labour law to make payments to workers injured at work. However, neither the mode of payments nor the benefit levels are adequate. In addition, benefits may not be paid in case of insolvency or bankruptcy of employers.

The Rana Plaza collapse and the Tazreen fire before it highlighted the need for a national scheme to support employees and their families in the event of accidents or injury at work.

A universal Employment Injury Insurance (EII) scheme funded through employer contributions would pay compensation based on loss of income and cover health care and rehabilitation related to work injuries and occupational diseases.

Had this been in place at the time of the Rana Plaza collapse it would have rapidly paid benefits to injured workers and eligible dependents of the deceased over their lifetime. Those needing medical treatment would have immediately received it as well as long-term care and rehabilitation services.

Since Rana Plaza much progress has been made to improve workplace safety in the Bangladesh garment industry and avoid any repetition of such a tragic incident. The Government has also worked with the ILO and Germany to look into the feasibility of establishing an EII scheme. Yet, while some progress has been made, there is still much to do before this can become reality.

The establishment of such a national scheme is a complex undertaking. However, the Rana Plaza compensation effort highlighted the clear benefits an EII scheme would bring for workers and employers alike.

Ensuring that there were sufficient funds as per actuarial estimation to pay benefits to the Rana Plaza workers was a major challenge. International brands, buyers and some charity organizations contributed to the compensation fund, which eventually reached its USD 30 million target. The lengthy process led to payments only being made when sufficient funds were available. As a result, beneficiaries were unsure when exactly they would receive any money.

Funded by employer contributions, an EII scheme would not need to seek contributions to pay claims every time an accident occurred. Delays would be avoided and workers would be certain to receive compensation in the event of an accident. Employers' business and assets would be protected against the financial consequences of catastrophic accidents through collective risk pooling. A scheme would also enhance the reputation of the industry with foreign buyers as they would no longer be at risk of having to pay claims if any accident occurred in a factory they source from.

Many lessons were also learned from the compensation process itself.

A key task was to develop a comprehensive list of workers present in factories on the day of accident. Yet this seemingly straightforward task was itself a major challenge. Many records were lost in the collapse. There was often limited knowledge amongst family members of the deceased about exactly where their loved ones had actually worked, what they had done or how much they had earned.

In some cases, one worker had used the ID of another, while a few workers who had joined just before the accident were yet to receive an ID. In addition, it was also difficult to verify an exact date of birth for some victims, another key criterion in calculating benefits.

Many family members had to make their way from remote areas to submit claims. In addition to bearing the cost of travel, accommodation

and food, lack of understanding about documents they needed to submit compounded their misery and led to further inconvenience and delays.

This experience highlighted the necessity of developing a comprehensive, accurate and up-to-date list of workers and their nominees that would be integral to the operation of an EII scheme. Such a database needs to be established centrally and besides many other benefits, would help ensure adequate and timely protection for injured workers or family members.

A lack of understanding on how compensation amounts were calculated led to confusion and dissatisfaction with compensation awards. Following Rana Plaza, victims received financial support from a variety of sources, such as the Prime Ministers Fund as well as from individual brands. However, it was not always clear to them that these amounts were considered as part of the overall compensation awards. Rumours swirled that victims would receive thousands if not tens of thousands of dollars. Some, depending on their circumstances, did receive large awards, but many did not. This led to resentment and in many cases debt, when victims had borrowed large sums in the expectation that they would receive enough compensation to pay it back.

Should an EII scheme be established it would be based on clear criteria and include pre-claims counseling as part of its services so that all claimants know what they are entitled to and why.

As the compensation scheme had to complete the tasks within a limited timeframe, the mechanism also had to deviate from making periodic payments as recommended by ILO Convention 121 on workplace injury. Instead, lump-sum payments were made. While receiving a large sum in one go may seem a blessing, the reality is often different. Poor financial literacy and a lack of resource management skills, coupled with pressures from relatives or family members made it difficult for beneficiaries to manage the funds they received.

However, Bangladesh's banking system has developed considerably over the recent years. The experience of the Rana Plaza Claims Administration in establishing bank accounts for workers and family members as well as using services such as bKash to make payments

were positive indications that the process of periodic payments is an achievable goal.

While all compensation claims had been paid and the Rana Plaza Claims Administration closed its operations in December 2015, complications arising from work-related injuries can continue for months or years and require continuous monitoring and care. A trust to provide ongoing medical care for injured Rana Plaza workers has been established by the Ministry of Labour and Employment, which is now in the process of becoming fully operational. However, delays in the process have led to beneficiaries often having to go without the support they need. A permanent mechanism under an EII scheme with sustainable funding would ensure continuous support service and greatly benefit the lives of those injured in workplace accidents.

Establishing an EII scheme is no simple task, yet the experiences of Rana Plaza Claims Administration which in just a short period of time put in place a comprehensive system that comprised the intake and review of over 5,000 claims, the development of an IT system to manage data, an administration, the carrying out of medical assessments and the development of a one-stop banking service showed what could be done.

To date, the Ministry of Labour and Employment and ILO have made initial steps to design an EII scheme including its administrative structure, costing, financing, health care and medical rehabilitation mechanism. Legislative changes may be needed as would agreement on the level of employers' contribution as a percentage of payrolls. While there are undoubtedly many challenges, what cannot be disputed is that an EII scheme would benefit workers, employers and the nation itself and for this reason it is a goal worth striving for.

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Trade Union

Major irregularity is lust for unlimited profit

Md. Mojibur Rahman Bhuiyan

During Rana Plaza collapse, role of trade union in highlighting the state of affected workers and their status at national and international levels was very significant. As the vice-chairman of BILS, noted trade union (TU) leader Md Mojibur Rahman Bhuiyan represented at various such initiatives. Besides being general secretary of ITUC-BC, he placed workers' reasonable demands concerning safe workplace and compensations before international quarter. His experience on Rana Plaza disaster and observations came to light through an interview. Md. Yousuf Al-Mamun took the interview.

Question: Rana Plaza disaster known as the biggest 'structural failure' of the world gives what signal to workers and about workplace?

Md. Mojibur Rahman Bhuiyan: Because of mismanagement, how many people may be killed—Rana Plaza accident is a major example of it. It has tremendously shaken not only Bangladesh, but also the people of entire world, leaders of international organisations, brands, buyers, retailers and TU movement of the world. I got an opportunity to work over the issues with different international organisations, including ITUC and IndustriALL. Information regarding the issue was published internationally.

From this disaster, we have learnt that our propaganda telling that our workplace is safe is totally wrong. And the international community has extended their hands of cooperation in a bid to recover workplace from this state as well as to ensure safe workplace for workers.

Question: What are the irregularities that you deem responsible for this disaster?

Md. Mojibur Rahman Bhuiyan: Major irregularity is profit, profit and profit which means a lust for limitless profit. While doing business, total indifference was shown towards workers' safety giving priority on mere profit. As a consequence, factories were set up in a haphazard manner on an unauthorized structure. Caring less for official rules, regulations and inspection, everything was done from the point of view of simple profit. Human rights, working atmosphere, TU rights, discussion with workers—nothing was considered.

Question: Because of this, Bangladesh garment sector faced what sort of risk? Do you think it has been possible to overcome the situation?

Md. Mojibur Rahman Bhuiyan: I think as soon as the risk arose, it has been possible to come out of it. There were coordinated efforts at national and international levels. In International arena, everyone became vocal about Bangladesh's garment sector. General people took to the streets chanting slogans like 'No More Blood-stained Apparel.' It was undoubtedly a matter of concern. All the disasters starting from Tazreen fire incident tarnished the image of Bangladesh garment sector. This was followed by Rana Plaza collapse that pushed it in great risk. So, readymade garment (RMG) owners were compelled to welcome Accord-Alliance to ensure safe workplace. Specially issues like ensuring building safety, fire safety, power safety, boiler safety, workplace safety, danger-free gas supply line, disaster-related trainings—everything was very important. Alongside formation of safety committee, proper application of law, tight inspection system and international standard of quality control—all issues were very essential. Because of lack of requirements or carelessness, relationship of many factories with Accord got snapped.

Question: Do you think snapping relationship with factory due to non-attainment of required standard will keep an adverse effect on labour market or, it is a far-reaching good initiative.

Md. Mojibur Rahman Bhuiyan: At the outset of Accord and Alliance, many expressed their skepticism. On behalf of international trade union, Alliance even the government was told for making employment arrangement of jobless workers of the factories which were closed for temporary period. Although the owners feared that 80 to 90 percent factories would be closed, but actually it did not happen. Only 10 percent factories were temporarily closed and all workers got jobs in other factories. Considering far-reaching effects, the process became fruitful to us.

Question: Do you think the workers got the highest compensation?

Md. Mojibur Rahman Bhuiyan: I think they got proper compensations. However, value of life cannot be counted with compensation.

Question: The factories with which Accord snapped ties or the factories which are at safety risk will come under whose responsibility?

Md. Mojibur Rahman Bhuiyan: This is an important question.

Regarding this, we on behalf of trade union, talked with Alliance and other parties. All of them replied that these factories are under the government and the government will have to take their responsibility. Only the government has the power to take the highest decision in this regard. The government must have to give importance to life of workers that are under risk. We have told this to the government and BGMEA.

Question: Five years after Rana Plaza tragedy, what is our learning? To whom we shall blame for the tragedy? What will be our future course of action in this regard?

Md. Mojibur Rahman Bhuiyan: This is the result of collective activities of all parties. There was lack of inspection, there was carelessness on the part of owners, there was indifference on the part of buyer-brand. To all of them, business and profit were more important than workplace safety or worker safety. The government was busy in foreign currency earning while the owners and the buyers were busy in earning profits, brand was busy in branding and retailers were busy in sales proceeds et cetera. But none had any headache regarding poor workers' protection and safety. Rana Plaza was a major cautionary signal for them. All will have to take lessons from this incident.

Question: Bangladesh is now going to transform into a developing country and presently, Bangladesh garment industry has a bright prospect in current global supply chain. From trade union point of view, what kind of initiative should be taken on the part of Bangladesh at national and international levels to push forward the bright prospect?

Md. Mojibur Rahman Bhuiyan: In my opinion, first of all ensuring trade union rights of RMG workers will be internationally acceptable major positive direction. This is because, Bangladesh garment industry will be criticised if TU rights are not ensured to its workers.

All international organizations that work for workers' rights and human rights organizations, including ILO and ITUC, will be conscious in this regard. They will give objection resulting in squeezing of our markets. The healthiest practice in this regard will be to establish a good owner-worker relationship which is possible only through trade union. If owners and workers remain united then there will be no barrier on the way. This is because; all problems may be resolved through collective bargaining and ensuring TU rights. It will help ensure a balanced industrial relationship. The countries where exists TU rights, workers in those countries get fair salaries. Why will it be lesser in our country?

This has been possible due to lack of TU activities. Secondly, I want to tell that we shall have to knit more valuable apparels in a bid to make the industry more profitable. We must have to increase research and development activities. Thirdly, our markets will have to be enlarged and we must find out markets anew.

Last of all, if we proceed through establishment of transparency and owner-worker unity after ensuring TU rights and taking government assistance then we'll be able to achieve quick development by resolving many problems. It is right that the thaw of present global supply chain is much bigger. ITUC general secretary Sharon Burrow has strongly mentioned that global supply chain has exploitation at every step.

Whatever it is, these supply chains are gradually coming to an understanding at international level and its result and influence can be felt at grassroots level. We shall have to face the issues tactfully bringing owners, workers and government together. And in this sphere, Rana Plaza disaster is a major learning for us.

Publication Policy

Bangladesh Institute of Labour Studies - BILS has been working on labour issues since its establishment in 1995. BILS endeavors to uphold the causes of working people and Trade Unions of Bangladesh. Twelve major National Trade Union federations are associated with BILS.

Keeping in view to build a just and democratic society, enabling the workers organizations to play proper role as a major force, BILS emphasizes on capacity building of the Trade Unions through trainings, research and information sharing. Protecting workers rights is the main objectives of BILS and it strives to promote fair and worker friendly policies and Laws in Bangladesh. It also plays the role of a catalyst in building relations between trade unions, civil society and the government on labour market issues.

The ‘Labour’ is a half- yearly journal published by BILS with twin objectives. The first objective is publishing research-based articles on different issues related to the labour, establishment of labour rights, labour welfare, labour laws and the likes. The research articles published are ‘double blind’ peer reviewed. Secondly, it publishes contributions from the labour activists focusing on the above-mentioned issues with the hope that the practical and empirical realities are properly recorded with an archival value. The journal actually seeks to provide an intellectual platform for the national and international scholars, critics, academicians, researchers and activists of labour rights and human rights issues. It aims to promote interdisciplinary research on labour laws, labour policy, occupational health and safety, job market situation, industrial relations, conflict resolution, wages, employment generation, workers migration and social safety net in Bangladesh.

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6. The author should retain a copy of the manuscript for his/her own reference.
7. Three (3) copies of article(s) are to be submitted to the Editor of the Journal in font size 12 (twelve) of Times New Roman on A4 size paper.
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Bangladesh Institute of Labour Studies-BILS was established in 1995. The main objectives of BILS are follows :

- To help in strengthening the democratic functioning of the trade unions and to improve their services towards the society.
- To assist the trade unions in Bangladesh for becoming self-reliant through education, training, research, campaign and communication among them and other social partners as well as civil society.
- To provide various support to the trade union movement in Bangladesh and to participate effectively in the development process of the country.
- To assist the increased participation and representation of women and young workers in trade unions.
- To eliminate all kinds of discrimination between male and female workers.
- To improve occupational health and safety situation and worker's welfare as a whole.
- To brighten the image of the trade union movement in Bangladesh and to increase the organised workforce & consolidate the strength of trade union movement.
- To establish greater unity in labour movement of Bangladesh.
- To undertake multifaceted activities for human resource development.
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