

## Angry factory owners

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Chairing the meeting Acting President of BGMEA Abdus Salam Murshey lost control over it as the members were repeatedly asking for an immediate solution to the problem.

Some members shouting in the meeting warned that they will be forced to close their factories if the government fails to take necessary actions against the ongoing attacks.

BGMEA leaders drew frowns from the agitated factory owners who said the leaders of the association should resign since they failed to take actions against the attacks and to involve the government in the process properly.

Some said as the government failed to save their property, it should provide compensations.

BGMEA leaders alleged that they went to the Prime Minister's Office in the morning but they were not allowed to meet her.

Top leaders of the association had to interject repeatedly in an effort to calm down the angry members but they did not succeed. Finally, the acting president was forced to wrap up the chaotic meeting after having suggestions from the leaders of different trade bodies but short of any specific decision.

Later, the members took to the street at 1:40 pm and gathered at the Sonargaon Hotel intersection obstructing vehicular traffic.

Former BGMEA presidents Redwan Ahmed, Ahammed, Quazi Moniruzzaman, Acting President Abdus Salam Murshey, BGMEA Director SM Fazul Hoque and other leaders and members stayed there for half an hour.

Earlier, speaking at the emergency meeting, Anisur Rahman Sinha, former president of BGMEA, stressed the need for bringing an immediate end to the attacks on garment factories, adding that it has become necessary to have discussions with workers' organisations and to work jointly to avoid more damage.

"We have to look into a long-term solution to the problem. We have to talk to the workers to find out whether it is an issue of outburst of the workers' accumulated grievances," he said.

The reality is that the overall situation in the garment sector is much better than the past, Sinha said adding that the improvement in social sector had not been highlighted enough.

Redwan Ahmed said he did not hesitate to take a position against the government in 1996 despite being a ruling party leader. He urged the prime minister and the leader of the opposition to have discussions with their workers' organisations and to take a common stand on the issue.

Quazi Moniruzzaman urged the government to deploy the army to tackle the situation immediately.

MA Momen, president of Dhaka Chamber of Commerce and Industry (DCCI) said the attacks on garment factories are not only a bad indication for the RMG sector but also for the national economy.

Terming the incidents very unusual, he underscored the need for finding out the reasons behind the attacks and identifying whether the problem is a deep-rooted one.

The DCCI president urged to form a national body to identify the reasons, adding that it should be neutral, acceptable to all and should include the representatives of workers.

Saeeful Islam, former president of DCCI, said business leaders need to be united to face the situation and all trade bodies should make a joint statement about the present situation.

AK Azad, president of Bangladesh Chamber of Industries, said the way the media presented the issue made the workers angrier. Sitting with top political leaders and finding a way out has become imperative, he said.

### CHAMBER LEADERS' VERSION

Some factory owners were crying and shouting how they have lost millions of dollars in products ready for shipment.

With the factory owners gathering, the BGMEA office turned into a place of grief and sorrow expressed in outbursts of anger. Garment factory owners chanted slogans demanding that the government tackles the situation immediately.

In the afternoon, business leaders from different chambers came to the BGMEA office to express their solidarity with the association leaders.

They urged the government to take immediate steps to save the country's highest foreign exchange earning sector.

Latifur Rahman, president of Metropolitan Chamber of Commerce and Industry (MCCI) said it is very natural to have disputes between workers and owners. But the incidents that took place during the last two days are not normal. The real reason of why the workers became violent is not clear, he said.

Any dispute between workers and owners should be solved at a table, he added.

He said, "It could be a conspiracy against our economic growth, which has been growing for the last few years."

He urged the government to ensure law and order so businesses could operate in a peaceful environment.

Mahbubur Rahman, president of International Chamber of Commerce Bangladesh (ICCB), said it is not a workers' unrest. "It's a calculated mechanism against our growing garments."

The demonstrators destroyed not only garment factories but also textile mills, medicine shops, packaging factories and dying factories, which proves that it is a planned formula to destroy the country's industries, he said. A deep conspiracy could be lurking behind the mechanism, he alleged.

He urged all business leaders to come forward to save the garment industry.

Abdul Awal Mintoo, former president of FBCCI said, "It is a planned incident." He said it is an industry which has to maintain buyers' requirements and lead time. In this situation government should take proper initiatives, he added.

Former president of MCCU Kutub Uddin Ahmed urged the government to give proper compensations to the factory owners whose factories have been damaged.

### BGMEA'S VERSION

A highly placed BGMEA leader requesting anonymity said a number of workers' forums like Jatiya Garments Sramik Kalyan Federation, Garments Sramik Oikya Forum, Sramik Sangram Parishad, Garments Sramik Sangram Parishad, and Garments Sramik Trade Union Kenda patronised the violence.

He said leaders of these organisations were present at the scenes and led the rampages. He also guessed that the leaders of these organisations could be patronised by internal or external powers.

In a rough estimate, BGMEA Vice-President (Finance) Shahadat Hossain Chowdhury Arun said 300 factories including 21 factories in

Savar EPZ were damaged during the two-day violence. The total loss of the garment industry is around Tk 400 crore, he claimed.

### BGMEA BOARD MEETING'S DECISION

An emergency board meeting of BGMEA presided over by its Acting President Abdus Salam Murshey yesterday decided to call an emergency general meeting (EGM) at 11:30am today. The meeting will be held in the Bangladesh Institute of Administration and Management (BIAM) auditorium. BGMEA leaders urged all garment industry stockholders to be present at the meeting.

It was addressed by Advocate Mostafa Nurul Alam, Kalyan Banerjee, Madhab Dutta, Sudhangshu Sekhar Sarkar, Sheikh Hasnuzzaman, Krishna Munda, Parimal Munda, Benu Munda, and Manzila Munda among others.

The speakers alleged that a group of attackers led by Monzur Rahi, a local leader of Jamaat, a key partner in the four-party ruling alliance, attacked the people of the indigenous community on April 17 at Kashipur under Shyamnagar upazila leaving 12 people injured.

Protesting and condemning the attack, the speakers demanded arrest of the perpetrators.

They alleged that the attackers also cut a channel on the embankment of a safe drinking water pond used by the indigenous community.

The channel made way for saline water to enter the pond making its water unsafe for drinking.

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## Jamaat leader

**FROM PAGE 16**

They also submitted a memorandum to the prime minister through the deputy commissioner (DC) to press home their 10-point charter of demands.

The rally organised by Sathkira Samprity Rakhi Committee was held at Shaheed Abdur Razzaq Park with the committee's district convener Kazi Riaz in the chair.

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ferring lands of indigenous communities, a group of land grabbers had occupied their lands using false deeds and later they pressured them to leave the place with threats, the speakers said.

A group of local land grabbers led by Monzur Rahi, who is son-in-law of a local Jamaat MP Gazi Nazrul Islam, and his elder brother Kamruzzaman have been hatching conspiracies to evict the indigenous people for the last four years, the speakers alleged.

They also alleged that police instead of taking action against the attackers, rather sided with them by recording a case against the Mundas. They urged the authorities concerned to ensure security for the lives and properties of the Munda community.

Their demands include ensuring security for about 1992 people residing at about 18 villages under Shyamnagar upazila, returning back the lands occupied by the vested quarters through false deeds, punishment for the attackers, increased allotment in the national budget for the Munda community, distribution of government lands among indigenous people, and stopping of harassment of the Ahmadiyans.

When contacted, Monzur Rahi denied the allegations and said a section of people is hatching conspiracies against him to tarnish his image in the society.

## Bhuiyan

**FROM PAGE 1**

violence in the last few days in Gazipur, Savar and Dhaka.

In a country, Bhuiyan said, disputes between workers and owners are obvious, the incidents that happened in the last few days are unprecedented in national and international arenas. "Those who have indulged in arson are enemies of the country," he said.

Bhuiyan said it is deplorable that workers of a particular factory launched attacks on other factories on the plea of realising their demands. "I personally feel that a worker cannot burn or damage his own factory... I have reports that outsiders have staged the violence."

The BNP secretary general urged the workers to place their demands and assured them of settling those through negotiations. "We'll cooperate with you in realisation of your demands," he said, urging the owners to accept their demands through discussions.

In response to the owners' demand for providing security, the minister said the government has arranged security for them.

Asked about police inaction during arson and violence by mobs, he said the police were liberal but were asked to take appropriate steps to control the situation.

He said adequate security measures have been taken for safety and security of the production units, and life and property.

A fire service vehicle was set ablaze when it attempted to extinguish the fire of the factory. Workers assaulted a reporter of Bangladesh Television and Manikganj correspondent of the daily Prothom Alo received head injury.

At 9:15am, the agitators ransacked an underconstruction factory of Mascot Group and set fire to some of its parts, and security guards locked in an altercation with them over continuing with production.

Three of the guards – Saiful Islam, Abdul Rahim and Shabu Shankar – were stabbed, while a private university student was injured here. The demonstrators also set fire to the guards' shelter and office.

As police took position at all intersections leading to the highways, workers in groups vandalised at least 10 vehicles. They pelted brickbats at the glass walls of roadside establishments including banks, Chinese restaurants, community centres and other business units.

Witnesses said, the workers of SQ Sweaters Ltd, another unit of SQ Fashion of Maona Sripur, declared a programme on Monday evening protesting the incidents at Savar and Gazipur.

At 10:00am, at least 50 workers were injured in Uttara and Tongi but no one was held, said police sources.

### MIRPUR

Agitating workers partially damaged

more than 40 garment units and 10 cars including a Volvo double-decker.

During the three-hour-long clashes on the Begum Rokeya Sarani and at sections one and six of Mirpur and Pallabi, 15 people were injured.

Around 4,000 workers took part in the procession at 9:30am chanting slogans for increasing their wages. The furious workers threw brickbats at the glass walls of roadside establishments including banks, Chinese restaurants, community centres and other business units.

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Sweaters at Sheorapara brought out a procession and started heading towards Pallabi where they met another group of workers. The procession went to different factories calling the workers out to join them.

The management of different factories shut down their factories within 11:00am for indefinite time.

The traffic movement from Mirpur section 12 to Agargaon remained stalled from the morning to 1:00pm.

At one stage local people and businessmen drove the workers away from the street, witnesses said.

### TEJGAON-MOHAKHALI

Some garment workers brought out a procession at Tejgaon and called the workers of different garment factories. They threw brickbats and started vandalising cars.

They also tried to involve the workers of Samah Razir Blade Factory in the movement but failed. The agitating workers then committed an arson on the factory. They also set fire to eight cars parked on its premises.

Another car was burnt in front of the National Shooting Complex at Gulshan at noon.

Police, Rab and Ansars were deployed in the area at noon to bring the situation under control.

Factory authorities claimed that the attackers damaged and looted machines worth over Tk 20 crore.

## Black Tuesday

**FROM PAGE 1**

Industry Ltd. The demonstrators said the factory management forced its workers to work night shift Monday and did not show any "sympathy for or respect" to their demands.

Over 50 people including some policemen were injured in sporadic clashes between police and thousand of workers during the four-hour bendar from 9:00am. Police lobbed 10 to 15 teargas shells and charged baton to disperse the demonstrating workers.

The mobs of workers also beat up five journalists and put up barricades on Dhaka-Aricha and Dhaka-Tongi-Ashulia-EPZ highways disrupting traffic movement. All shops and offices on both sides of the highways remained closed.

When the workers put Little Star Knitting Industry on fire, law enforcers including Rab lobbed teargas canisters at 10:30am to disperse them, triggering a series of chases and counter-chases.

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