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on paying workers and executing orders. That is the story of most of the manufacturers and so the inevitable happened and that is precisely why over 60 percent of garment factories are ailing.

However, thanks to some wise and visionary manufacturers, the industry continued to thrive, giving a rather false sense of security that the sector was well on track and that problems would soon be resolved. But those judicious investors are not safe today either, as aggrieved workers of the sick factories are taking their pent-up frustration of neglect out on well-managed industries. Despite paying reasonable staff salaries and graduating themselves into medium-end market, premium manufacturers are paying a hefty price for the mistakes of fellow errant investors, with the government a mere spectator.

The state too can be safely blamed for its failure in streamlining a sector that grew up in the most disorganised manner. All the governments demonstrated their policy of bankruptcy, lack of political will, apathy and failure in handling the chronic crisis, pushing the industry to almost well beyond repair. The total disrespect and neglect of policymakers towards the most revenue-earning sector is showcased in the remarks of late M Saifur Rahman, the three-time finance minister who once compared garment exporters with tailors. That unfortunate tag precisely demonstrates how unhelpful the environment was for a sector to bloom.

No government ever felt the need to formulate a visionary policy for the industry, let alone sincerely pursue it to prosperity. They just could not care less. Not a single minister or lawmaker ever cared to understand what was hurting the goose that was laying the golden eggs. The governments were only interested in the revenue aspect, not in the problems.

When the sector bloomed on its own, no government came forward to help set up backward linkage factories, a crucial support sector that could give Bangladeshi garments a huge edge over competing countries. Also, it never felt the need to ensure that exporters got prompt and privileged services from banks, ports and the transport sector. For some ambiguous reasons, policymakers always turned a deaf ear to the demands of manufacturers to arrange a central bonded warehouse for woven fabrics, accessories and a separate ministry for garment.

As if that was not a big enough show of neglect, whenever worker unrest hit the industry, the government machinery was quick to find a conspiracy by both national and international enemies instead of trying to identify the roots of the problems and helping to fix them. But nothing could harm the sector more than the government's failure to protect industries from rioting workers, who damaged and burnt their machinery and workplaces for consecutive days over the years. This particular inaction was strong enough for buyers and industrialists to clearly understand that the business climate in Bangladesh was no longer safe.

Owners and governments apart, there were others -- political parties, a section of workers, labour leaders and banks -- each of whom have contributed their fair share in the crime.

Workers made a difference for garment exporters in the $500 billion world apparel business. Their cheap labour gave a decisive edge over other competitors. They made up their shortcomings in skills by being mostly docile and dedicated in learning the ropes quickly. They just worked and watched silently how badly their owners handled their skill development and