

welfare issues for decades. They saw it all, bore it all, until recent years when the cost of living sky-rocketed.

They hoped in vain that the government would make their employers listen to their pleas for better pay. They heard enough of the reality that garment price in cheap apparel market has not gone up in 12 years. Rather, the price of a basic t-shirt has gone down by a few cents from what it was 10 years ago at $1. They understood it all -- the miserly buyers, opportunist labour leaders, shady rights leaders and dishonest politicians -- each of the quarters cashed in on their plight. And eventually they took to the streets, soon turning into mindless mobs who were destroying what they had built. But what they could not realise was that they had actually started to drive the apparel economy away from Bangladesh to safer destinations in South East Asia.

So, is it all over for the garment sector?

It seems to be headed that way -- unless we all wake up to the rude reality and do what is needed to be done right away. All the stakeholders must join hands to get the sector out of the quagmire and back on track, with the government playing the pivotal role. The first and foremost thing to do is to ensure safety of investment, that no matter how grave the problem is for the workers, not a single factory can be harmed by anyone. The government must make sure that the business climate is congenial, absolutely safe for buyers as well as manufacturers. Attackers or troublemakers of the industry have to be dealt with no mercy.

Then the labour issues must be addressed, for which collective effort is a must. The government must identify sick industries and separate