Two days later, after the collapse of ill-fated Rana Plaza, she is rescued from the debris and dead people. From waist down, her left leg is cut off. For her family, the help they are getting from the local people is too meagre survive in Dhaka. Shirin's husband Md Ataur who is also a garment worker decided not to go back to the factory again. "My wife suffers a lot. I do not want to suffer like her," he says.

Awami League in its 2008 election manifesto pledged to amend the Labour Law 2006 to ensure the basic rights of the worker which is enshrined in the Constitution and follow the principle of the International Labour Organisation's (ILO) core conventions. However labour activists claim that the party has changed its stance and now overlooks the primary needs of the workers in the amended law.



PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

Many workers are trying to cope with the worst economic conditions of their lives.

Old Book, New Cover?

The series of Industrial accidents and international pressure have forced the government to amend the Labour Act 2006. However, the amended law, meant to bring changes in the lives of the workers, has become mired in controversy. Since the changes that the amended law might bring have still been kept in the dark, general workers aren't at all happy with it, says leading labour activists.

In the apparels sector, the common problems of the workers are low wages, lack of proper trade union rights, arbitrary abduction, irregular payment, forceful overtime, poor working environment, physical and sexual harassment, arbitrary termination and more importantly, accidents and deaths because of safety and security failures.

Worker leaders allege that the government neglected the proposal made by the workers when the draft law was made. Workers have been demanding certain provisions that include: trade union rights without any barrier, proper maternity leave and benefits, gratuity benefits, profit sharing, safety issue etc.

Labour rights activist Kolpona Akter who heads the Bangladesh Center for Worker Solidarity (BCWS) says, "Same laws and provisions for rights are always in the constitution. The constitution has recognised the fundamental rights of the workers, including necessary social protection, at workplaces. But the government never practices the law properly. So I do not think the amended law which is just a modification of Labour Act 2006 can bring any change to the scenario."