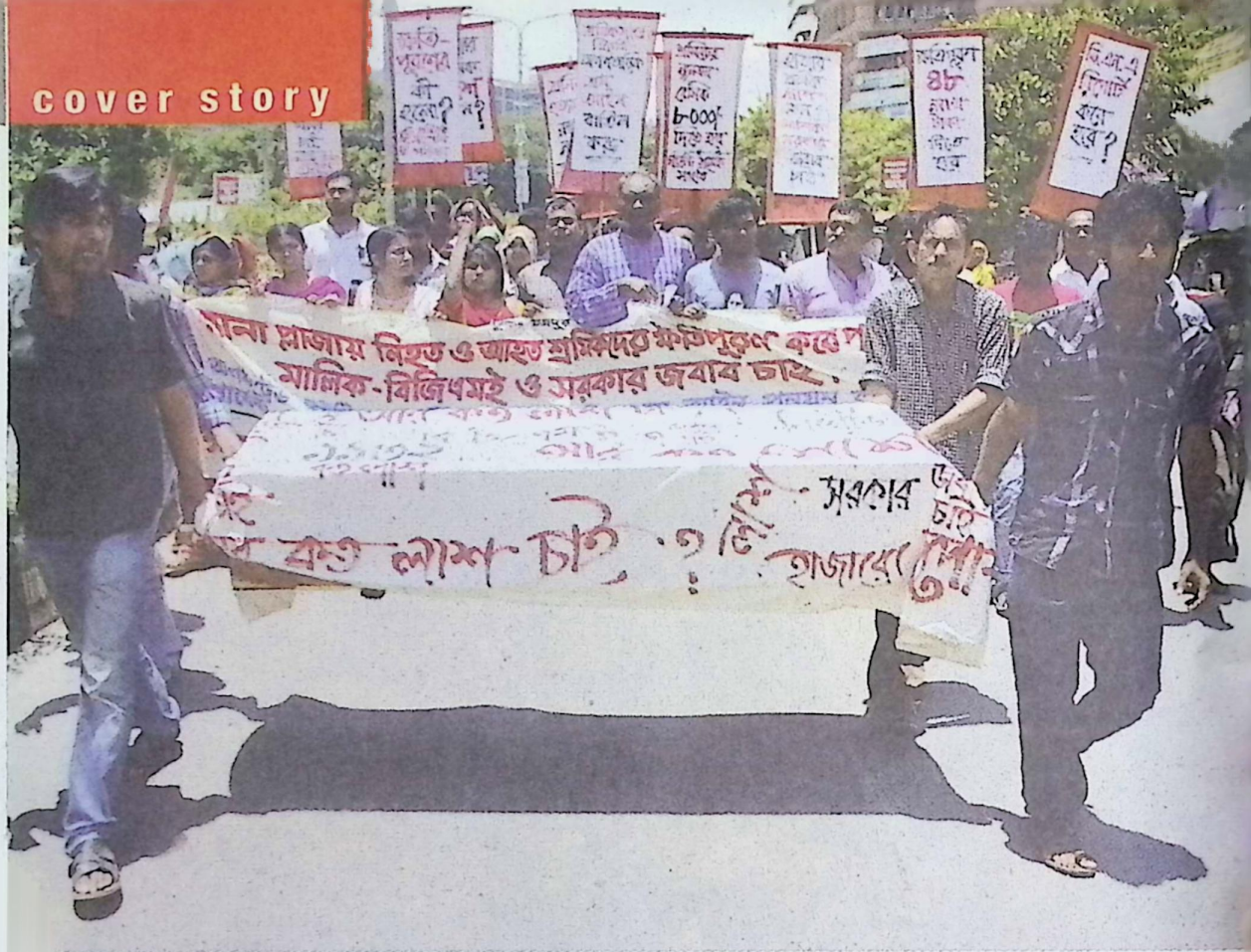


Protest rally after the Rana Plaza collapse. PHOTO: AFP

New Law, Old Debate

In the last couple of hundred years under the British and Pakistan regime, Bangladesh has witnessed at least 44 different laws ensuring labour rights. However, to make a more precise and effective law, the government in 1992 formed a labour law commission, which prepared a draft labour code in 1994. The draft code was passed 12 years later in October 11, 2006. However, it carried some old clichés about labour rights.

According to the labour leaders, the amended law, enact on June 15, is just a shadow of its predecessor. Before the law was amended, the right to union without employers' interference is the most talked about issue among the workers and the owners. Even though the amended law discards the authorisation power of garment owners, the power it has given to the labour directorate will put the same hurdle before forming a trade union.

Kolpona believes that the amended law is a weapon to weaken the trade union movement. She says that as per the law the labour director will review trade union applications and will consequently allow them, but it is not mentioned in the law what kind of procedure the labour department will follow. "Workers are not all that much educated, trained with negotiation to face this kind of obligation. Moreover it is not mentioned in the law that on what criteria have to be met before a director gives permission for a trade union. So without proper direction it is still a vague section," Kolpona says.

After the Compensation Act-2005 is activated, in the last eight years the scenario remains in the same place as it was in 2005.

The amended law, moreover, restricts the labour rights in other ways. In the private and government offices, employees get six months maternity leave but the law entitles only four months maternity for women workers. It also