

Rana Plaza victims still await compensation

Brands fail to show up for an International Labour Organisation-chaired meeting due to decide on long-term compensation for thousands affected by April's factory collapse in Dhaka

PER LILJA, for TIME

Victims of the world's worst garment factory disaster at Rana Plaza in Bangladesh are still no closer to compensation after a meeting called to mediate demands was deemed a failure by organisers. Global labor union IndustriALL slammed retailers after only a third of the brands that used the Dhaka manufacturing hub, which collapsed on April 24, turned up in Geneva on Thursday.

"Consumers will be shocked that almost a half-year has passed since the Rana Plaza disaster with only one brand so far providing any compensation to the disaster's victim," IndustriALL assistant general

secretary Monika Kemperle stated. "I respect those brands that came to these meetings. But I cannot understand brands that are not around the table."

IndustriALL, which represents 50 million workers in the mining, energy and manufacturing sectors, arranged the meeting with the International Labour Organization as a neutral chair. Their framework for assessing long-term compensation stems from a disaster similar to Rana Plaza in 2005, when the eight-story Spectrum factory outside of the Bangladeshi capital collapsed. Surviving victims and families of the 62 fatalities were compensated for lost income, pain and suffering up to 25 years after the incident.

In the case of Rana Plaza, 1,192 bodies were recovered and 1,900 workers were injured. Using the model set up for the Spectrum collapse, IndustriALL calculated a total compensation of \$74,571,101 to be paid between retailers, the Dhaka government and factory owners.

The meeting was supposed to initiate discussions between brands on how to divide and expedite payments, and also how to influence Bangladeshi stakeholders to do their share.

In the months that followed, Roy Ramesh Chandra has led IndustriALL's operation to identify those entitled to compensation. "So far, the approach has not been integrated between organisations,

which has made the task very difficult," he says. "We have sent teams to the villages, to talk to school teachers, elders and religious leaders to verify people's claims."

According to Chandra, it will take another month to finalise the list of beneficiaries. During that time, DNA-testing of bodies that have not yet been identified should be finalised too. However, without anyone committed to paying the actual compensation, these discoveries will be of little use.

"There have been seven severe accidents after the Spectrum collapse. Our hope has been that Rana Plaza would help us find a permanent solution," says Chandra.

In a statement from Biagio Chiarolanza, CEO of Benetton Group, an Italian company which manufactured clothes at Rana Plaza at the time of the disaster, the meeting in Geneva lacked "clarity around the objectives." He highlighted that Benetton had signed the newly formed Bangladesh Fire & Building Safety Accord and that they had entered a partnership with the Bangladesh-based NGO BRAC.

The Bangladeshi government and UK brand Primark have already made payments to over 3,000 Rana Plaza victims. On Thursday, Primark was the only brand that pledged further short-term financial aid.



Rushanara Ali, shadow minister for international development UK, inaugurates NRB Bank's Sylhet main branch in the city recently. Iqbal Ahmed, chairman of the bank, was also present.



Rashed Maqsood, Citi country officer, receives the National Board of Revenue's top taxpayer award in the 'top 10 firms' category on behalf of his bank from Finance Minister AMA Muhith in Dhaka recently. The bank won the award three times in a row.

GP pledges better services in Ctg with 3G support

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

Grameenphone plans to give better services to Chittagong customers with a faster 3G network to secure the top position in the region.

The company's Chief Marketing Officer Allan Bonke said 3G services would be launched in parts of the port city by October 15, at the time when some areas of Dhaka city would also come under 3G coverage.

"Our effort will be more aggressive to give more focus in Chittagong. Now we are supported by 3G network and therefore good speed and good coverage are coming up."

The operator plans to cover Agrabad area with 3G by October 15, Bonke said.

Other parts of the city will be covered gradually, like Khulshi by November 14, Pahartali and Kotwali areas along with Cox's Bazar town, beach and St Martin's Island by the third week of December, he said.

Other Chittagong areas like Halishahar, CEPZ and Potenga will be covered by the end of December, he said.

In Chittagong, Grameenphone holds the second largest position behind Robi in terms of the number of subscribers.

Bonke hoped the company would be able to win the hearts of more Chittagong people and secure the top position by introducing quality and affordable 3G packages and devices.

Grameenphone acquired 10 megahertz of 3G-spectrum, more than any of its competitors who participated in an auction arranged by BTRC recently.

The mobile operator will facilitate the rollout of a nationwide 3G network with enhanced capacity and instant mobile internet access for customers, he said.

Customers will not have to pay fees for migrating to 3G services and will not need to change their existing SIM cards, said Grameenphone's Chief Corporate Affairs Officer Mahmud Hossain.

RMG owners propose 20pc pay hike

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Earlier, Sirajul Islam Rony, workers' representative on the board, by taking into account the workers' daily calorie intake and expenses, recommended a minimum wage of Tk 8,114 per month, a 170.5 percent rise from the current level. The amount excludes other benefits.

"That figure is unfeasible as many small and medium factories do not have the

capacity to raise their wage bills by that big an amount."

"Having said that, this is not the final round of negotiations—I hope the board has further room for negotiations."

After extensive criticism from around the globe, the government in May announced a new wage board for garment workers.

The minimum wage was last raised to Tk 3,000 in November 2010, from Tk 1,662.5.

India inflation surges to 6-month high

AFP, New Delhi

India's inflation surged to a six-month high in August, data showed Monday, strengthening chances the new central bank governor will freeze interest rates despite a struggling economy.

Inflation, as measured by the Wholesale Price Index, hit 6.10 percent in August from a year earlier and was up from 5.79 percent in July.

"Rising wholesale price inflation will take rate cuts off the agenda until well into next year," said Capital Economics economist Daniel Martin.

The data comes as former International Monetary Fund chief economist Raghuram Rajan, famed for forecasting the 2008 global financial meltdown, prepares to chair his first monetary policy-setting meeting on Friday.

India's once-booming economy is caught in a quagmire of sharply slowing growth, stubbornly high inflation and a record current account deficit that has pushed the rupee sharply lower.

Rajan has already declared he sees his main role as sustaining "low and stable expectations of inflation" and analysts said he could not ignore the latest price data.

They said the impact of the rupee's sharp fall on the price of fuel, most of which is imported, and other commodities would also soon start showing up in the inflation figures.

The August data surprised markets which expected the figure to be in line with July's.

The inflation increase was driven mainly by food price rises due to crop damage caused by monsoon flooding.

Onion prices, a dietary staple especially for the poor masses, soared a massive 245 percent from a year earlier while the cost of fruit, eggs and other goods also climbed.

The scandal-scarred government of Premier Manmohan Singh has been anxious to tame inflation -- especially of food -- and revive the economy as it seeks re-election in polls due by May 2014.

But the weak rupee and inflation have curbed the bank's room to cut rates to stimulate an economy which grew last year at five percent, its slowest pace in a decade.

The central bank cut rates in early 2013 but was forced to tighten monetary policy again to try to stem the rupee's fall.

Tax fair pulls crowd, but tech glitch sours mood

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"It does not go with the government's promise to build a 'Digital Bangladesh,'" said Mustafizur Rahman, a businessman from Old Dhaka.

"The problem arose from occasional technical disturbances in the Election Commission server, which is not in our control," said Md Bashir Uddin Ahmed, member (taxes, admin and human resources development) of the NBR.

An IT official of the Election Commission said the problem was due to a huge pressure as too many requests were coming at the same time.

The problem also lies in the NBR server, he said, adding that a team was working to sort it out.

Since the launch of the online TIN registration system in July, 2.6 lakh taxpayers were registered until September 15, according to the NBR.



Jim McCabe, chief executive officer of Standard Chartered Bank Bangladesh, receives the award for 'Best Foreign Commercial Bank in Bangladesh' at the FinanceAsia 2013 Country Awards at Fort Canning hotel in Singapore on Thursday.

Jamuna Bank gets new DMD

STAR BUSINESS DESK



A K M Saifuddin Ahamed has recently been promoted to deputy managing director of Jamuna Bank Ltd, the bank said in a statement yesterday.

Ahamed started his banking career in 1984 with National Bank. He has experience in international banking, global trade services, treasury and financial crime.

Ahamed has been working as one of the founding executives of Jamuna Bank since its inception. He completed his master's in marketing from Dhaka University.

North American alliance agrees to follow national building code

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The standards align with the Bangladesh National Building Code and also support the National Tripartite Plan of Action.

As part of the alliance's commitment to transparency and collaboration, the draft standards were presented at the ILO-convened meeting in Dhaka on September 7 and were shared in advance of the meeting with the ILO, the Accord on Fire and Building Safety in Bangladesh, BGMEA, BUET and labour and employment ministry, she added.

"Our goal is to accelerate the identification of a common, shared set of standards that will ultimately result in making these factories safer."

The founding 17 members of the alliance have also submitted their list of factories that they contract with in Bangladesh and shared that information with the Fair Factories Clearinghouse (FFC), a New York-based non-profit organisation that uses technology to enable cost-effective, ethical business transactions and continuous improvements in global workplaces.

FFC members utilise the online information-sharing platform to monitor their compliance programmes, manage factory audits and resulting corrective action plan and collaborate with other companies to assess and improve factory workplace conditions.

"We will be sharing this information with the government of Bangladesh," Tauscher said, adding that the alliance has developed a safety training curriculum framework that will be used with factory managers and employees.

Tauscher, who held a meeting with the leaders of Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA), also said the alliance will inspect 500 factories by July next year. She, however, did not specify when the factory inspections would start.

She said the alliance wants to work with the Accord on Factory and Building Safety in Bangladesh, a similar platform consisting mostly European retailers, to avoid duplication of factory inspections. But, the accord is yet to respond to the government's request for a common checklist during inspection.

"As part of our commitment to worker empowerment, the alliance has identified innovative technology solutions that will allow workers to anonymously report their safety concerns," she said.

"We support worker participation in the garment factories," said Jeffrey Krilla, president and chief executive officer of the alliance.

BGMEA President Atiqul Islam also spoke.

SpaceforRentatChittagong... BANK,UNIVERSITY/HOSPITAL

RAMNABHABAN

@jamalkhanRoad

**APROJECTOF
JAMILGROUP**

HOTLINE

01819-310899, 01714-087633

E-mail: info@jamilgroupbd.com

JAMILREALESTATE LTD.

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ICT Minister Mostafa Faruque Mohammed, poses with Vivek Sood, chief executive of Grameenphone, and Mubin Khan, managing director of EATL Mobile Apps, after the signing of an agreement between the companies for development of integrated apps for 3G subscribers recently.



Atiqur Rahman, governor of Bangladesh Bank, inaugurates CBL Money Transfer in Malaysia recently. AKM Atiqur Rahman, Bangladeshi high commissioner to Malaysia; Rubel Aziz, chairman of City Bank, and Aziz Al Kaiser, chairman of CBL Money Transfer, were also present.