Let's Hope Next Year is Better

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Every year around this time, I find myself sounding more and more like a parrot repeating the same phrase, "where did the time go?" over and over again. Here we are being propelled towards the New Year and I feel as if I have barely had time to experience the year gone by. Maybe it's an age related symptom where the older you get the faster time seems to go. Right now everything feels as if it is taking place at a frenzied pace as everyone gears up for ushering in 2014. It's a time for both reminiscing and a time for looking to the future.



PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

Rana Plaza collapse, April 2013.

For Bangladesh 2013 has not been one of its best years with both political and economic unrest besieging the nation. The Rana Plaza disaster where an eight storied building collapsed leaving over eleven hundred people dead and more than two thousand people injured seemed to have set the tone for the rest of the year. The tragedy was one that caught the world's attention with the haunting and often poignant pictures of the dead and injured flooding our television screens and newspapers.

It was also the response of the government that left people incredulous and outraged. The Prime Minister's initial attempts at denying that the owner of Rana Plaza was a member of the Jubo League and subsequently having to retract her statement did not do much for the credibility of the ruling party. To add to that the utterly callous remark by the Finance Minister Abul Maal Abdul Muhith was received by the public with derision and disgust where he stated that, "The present difficulties ... well, I don't think it is really serious — it's an accident." I am sure he wishes that he could take back those words considering the Rana Plaza disaster is said to be the most catastrophic garment accident in history. The combination of this debacle, the dissatisfaction of the garments factory workers and global concern for better working conditions and pay for the workers have left the garments industry in turmoil and in a highly vulnerable position. This is disastrous for the country as this sector constitutes almost 80% of our exports and employs almost four million people, most of them women.

If this was not enough the nation has been beleaguered by constant strikes (hartals) over the