

Star BUSINESS

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BB working to create jobs for Rana Plaza volunteers

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

The central bank has taken an initiative to provide Rana Plaza volunteers with jobs at various banks and financial institutions.

A database of the volunteers along with their curriculum vitae is being prepared and will be shared with different banks and financial institutions, Bangladesh Bank said in a statement yesterday.

The BB will then take measures to provide jobs to the volunteers, it said.

The central bank has already provided honorary certificates and cash Tk 5,000 to each of the 135 volunteers selected from a list prepared by the armed forces, it said.

The BB also expressed condolence to the families of the dead in the Rana Plaza tragedy. It said BB and other banks deposited Tk 100 crore as grant to the Prime Minister's relief fund for the affected.

From the central bank's CSRF fund, Tk 1 crore was given as grant to the Fire Service and Civil Defence to purchase fire fighting equipment, it said.

Besides, to raise safety in the garment sector, a special financing programme was taken by the BB with the financial assistance of Japan International cooperation Agency.

The aftermath of disaster

Some constructive steps were taken in the last one year, but compensation still remains elusive



MD FAZLUR RAHMAN

No event in recent memory has drawn so much attention to Bangladesh from all corners of the world as did the collapse of the Rana Plaza building -- the worst disaster in the garment industry history -- on this day last year.

The haunting images of the despondent rubble of the unauthorised eight-storey building brought out a public outrage against the 'Made in Bangladesh' label, not seen before in the Western world.

The indignation though switched the government, garment factory owners and international retailers in to a pause for thought.

Now, everyone is convinced that business cannot go on as before and the poor workers cannot continue to jeopardise their lives and

wellbeing any longer -- for the sake of lining the pockets of factory owners and retailers.

Indeed, they have taken some constructive steps, all with the eye to ensuring that another catastrophic collapse or fire never takes place again.

First off was the inspection drive undertaken by the government and Western retailers to check the plants for structural and fire safety. The exercise started in November last year, and so far 900 factories have been examined.

While small faults were found in all the buildings, only 13 factories were found to be unsafe for operation.

An additional step was undertaken to ensure that workers have the voice to reject unsafe working conditions: the labour law was amended in July last year to give workers the

APRIL 24 will be imprinted in history as the worst industrial tragedy for Bangladesh, and it changed the narrative of the garment sector. Stakeholders started thinking of the well being of the workers responsible for its success.

right to freely associate in factories, among others. As of today, some 141 new trade unions have registered with the ministry of labour.

To safeguard the wellbeing of workers, minimum wage was increased 77 percent to Tk 5,300 in December last year. While it fell short of workers' expectations, factory owners insist it is the threshold for the sustainability of their businesses.

On the flipside, Bangladesh still remains the cheapest source of labour in the world, a massive comparative advantage over its competitors.

The government is also reorganising its capacity through empowering the Fire Service and Civil Defence to develop skills and technical expertise to deal with fire, electrical and structural safety issues.

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CPD recommends commission for Rana Plaza victims

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The Centre for Policy Dialogue yesterday suggested the government establish a national commission with strong executive authority to solve the problems affecting the Rana Plaza victims and the garment sector as a whole.

Rehman Sobhan, chairman of the local think-tank, said the commission would be headed by a high-powered person with other responsible people from within and outside the government, particularly from the civil society.

"The commission will have full executive authority and not just oversight responsibility. It will discharge duties on a full-time basis," he said during a dialogue on the Rana Plaza tragedy, at the Brac Centre Inn in Dhaka.

Sobhan said the victims would be able to contact the commission to inform about their problems. "The commission will immediately act to solve the problem."

The noted economist also said the commission would take steps for the better of the entire garment industry.

Sobhan also said there should be full transparency and accountability about the funds being mobilised in the name of Rana Plaza victims from both domestic and international sources.

He urged the civil society to ensure that the voices of workers are heard if the government fails to deliver on its responsibilities.

The government will also need to work on the institutional conditions which created Rana Plaza, Sobhan said.

"This would be our expectation from a democratic and accountable government committed to good governance and addressing the people who have made Bangladesh a highly competitive country in the global garment trade."

SUGGESTIONS

- Forming a commission to help Rana Plaza victims
- Ensuring transparency in Prime Minister's fund
- Declaring April 24 as Workers Safety Day
- Issuing cards to survivors for lifetime free treatment
- Upgrading capacity of the labour ministry

Join hands for positive changes

ILO's Bangladesh chief says reforms can only come from joint efforts of management and workers

REFAYET ULLAH MIRDHA

The relationship between factory management and workers has improved tremendously since the Rana Plaza building collapse on April 24 last year, according to an official of International Labour Organisation.

"The registration of 134 trade unions in the last 15 months, compared to only three in the last three years, indicates that the relationship has started improving," Srinivasa Reddy, the ILO country director for Bangladesh, said in an interview with The Daily Star recently.

He said the relationship between the government, owners, and workers should be used as a partnership, as Bangladesh has a lot of opportunities in the garment business worldwide.

Following the Rana Plaza building collapse, the entire sector is going through broad reforms; many modifications have been made by the



Srinivasa Reddy

government, international communities and owners, Reddy said.

"I see a great opportunity and bigger business for Bangladesh in near future. I also see good progress in factory inspection by Buet (Bangla-

desh University of Engineering and Technology), Accord and Alliance."

A total of 900 factories, or 25 percent of the total active units, have so far been inspected, according to ILO data.

"Owners have also started factory renovations, for which one million out of around four million workers are getting a safer workplace. Gradually, with completion of the inspection by the yearend, all the four million workers will have safer workplace," Reddy said.

Regarding the inspections, he said flaws may be found in some factories, but remediation is a kind of investment for future business.

Referring to a survey by McKinsey & Company, a global management consulting firm and trusted adviser to leading global businesses, governments and institutions, Reddy said Bangladesh's high growth in the apparel sector will continue for positive reforms.

Retailers shy away from compensation

REFAYET ULLAH MIRDHA

All but one of the 29 international retailers that sourced from factories housed at Rana Plaza are yet to donate any money to the trust fund for victims of the building collapse.

So far, only \$15 million has been collected in the trust fund managed by the International Labour Organisation against the required amount of \$40 million. Of the 29 retailers, only British retailer Primark has put in \$10 million.

Roy Ramesh Chandra, general secretary of the local arm of IndustriALL, a global union federation, which initiated the trust fund to compensate the victims according to ILO Convention 121, said another 14 retailers have agreed to contribute to the trust fund but have not yet.

As per ILO Convention 121, a dead worker's family is due to receive nearly Tk 29 lakh and each of the permanently disabled and injured workers Tk 42 lakh and Tk 14 lakh respectively.

He said the ILO started giving out compensations from the trust fund yesterday; Tk 50,000 for each of the victims was dispatched in the first phase.

In addition to the 29 retailers, IndustriALL also wrote to the 150 signatories of the Accord on Fire and Building Safety in Bangladesh for their benevolent contribution to the fund.

"We will continue our campaign on both the domestic and international front until all retailers contribute to the fund."

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