

Primark to open its first US stores

BBC NEWS

Budget clothing retailer Primark is to open its first US stores, beginning with a 70,000 sq-ft shop in Boston in Massachusetts.

Primark plans to open the store towards the end of 2015. Negotiations are also under way to open more shops in the north-east of the US by the middle of 2016.

"After extensive research, it has been decided to take the [Primark] concept to consumers in the USA," Primark owner Associated British Foods said. Primark has more than 250 shops in Europe, and has grown rapidly over the past 10 years.

The company has been expanding internationally since 2006, when it opened its first store in Spain. Shops in the Netherlands, Portugal, Germany, Belgium, Austria and France followed.

However, UK companies have had a chequered history in the US. Marks & Spencer left the US market in 2001 after selling the Brooks Brothers clothing chain, and in 2013, Tesco offloaded its loss-making Fresh & Easy food chain.

However, Arcadia Group announced in

February that it would continue US expansion of Topshop and Topman by opening a flagship store on Fifth Avenue in New York in the autumn.

The announcement of Primark's push into the US came as Associated British Foods reported half-year results. In the 24 weeks to 1 March, adjusted pre-tax profits rose 4 percent to £468m.

Group profits were largely driven by its retail and grocery arms, chairman Charles Sinclair said. Operating profits at its retail operations, which include Primark and Penneys-branded stores in Ireland, rose 26 percent to £298m.

In the UK grocery group, growth by Ovale and Twinings was partly offset by lower sugar prices and sales volumes at Silver Spoon.

Shares in Associated British Foods were up more than 8 percent in morning trade.

Bangladesh disaster payments Primark is a major contributor to compensation for the victims and families of the Rana Plaza factory collapse in Bangladesh last year.

Out of a total of \$12m (£7m) compensation, \$7m was accounted for in last year's results, and \$5m has been charged in the year to date.

CPD recommends commission for Rana Plaza victims

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Mustafizur Rahman, executive director of CPD, said the government would have to see whether April 24 could be declared Workers' Safety Day.

The government could also think of building a memorial at the site of Rana Plaza to honour the victims and a Workers' Safety Centre where workers will be able to get information, he added.

Shirin Akhter, a lawmaker and labour activist, said the situation might have panned out differently if trade unions had been in the factories at Rana Plaza. "The union leaders would definitely protest the forced entry."

She said the country would have to make a long-term strategy for the welfare of the victims, so that the injured and the families of the dead workers do not feel that their sacrifices were worthless.

One participant also called for providing a card to survivors that will enable them to get free treatment in government hospitals.

Participants also called for a permanent centre where they will be able to lodge complaints.

They said long-term treatment should be ensured for the injured, rescuers and volunteers, who are now finding it difficult to lead a normal life.

KG Moazzem, additional research director of CPD, said the government should upgrade the capacity of the labour ministry and the Fire Service and Civil Defence so that they can take on disasters like Rana Plaza collapse.



Md Omar Faruque Bhuiyan, head of cards at NCC Bank, and Shagufa Anwar, general manager for marketing at Apollo Hospitals Dhaka, exchange documents of an agreement at a programme recently for the bank's credit and debit cardholders and employees to get special services and discounts at the hospital.



Helal Ahmed Chowdhury, managing director of Pubali Bank, and Taufique Ahmed Chowdhury, director general of Bangladesh Institute of Bank Management, pose with the participants of a 15-day audit training jointly organised by the two organisations in Dhaka recently.



Ashoke Madhab Roy, additional secretary to the LGRD ministry, opens MTB Tax Collection Booth at Habiganj Municipality building in Habiganj recently. Md Hashem Chowdhury, deputy managing director of Mutual Trust Bank, was also present.

Tofail seeks envoys' support

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Many factories still continue to harass and prosecute labour union leaders, she said. British High Commissioner Robert Gibson said Bangladesh made significant progress since the Rana Plaza tragedy but "big challenges still remain".

The building collapse is a wake-up call for all, he said, adding that all parties should take necessary steps to prevent such disaster.

The Netherlands' Ambassador Gerben de Jong said the government, employers' associations, trade unions, brands and international community must continue to work together for the transformation of the garment sector.

Join hands for positive changes

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The McKinsey report said Bangladesh will be able to export garment items worth \$42 billion by the end of 2020.

"Had there been a proper collective bargaining system in the country's garment sector, the Rana Plaza tragedy might not have taken place as the union leaders would have protected the workers and stopped them from entering a risky workplace."

On the issue of compensation packages for the victims of Rana Plaza, Reddy said payment will be ensured under Convention 121 of the ILO, so that the workers get more.

It is mandatory for the 29 retailers and brands that used to source garment items from the five factories housed in the Rana Plaza building to contribute to the trust fund for the victims, he said.

So far, 15 retailers and brands deposited a total of \$15 million in the trust fund. IndustriALL Global Union, a federation of trade unions, formed the \$40 million trust fund for the victims. ILO is the fund's neutral chair.

A central database of workers and factories is also needed now as the industry has been growing for the last three decades, Reddy said.

"Had there been a central database for workers, compensation disbursement would not have been so complicated."

The most difficult job in the payment of compensation is collecting information on the victims to pay the right person. In the absence of a database, in some cases, more than one person by one name is claiming money from the authori-

Understanding the pain of the victims

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Hundreds more received psychosocial counselling and medical check-ups. Already 350 survivors and relatives of the victims have been identified for seed capital and are going through skills development training and apprenticeships.

This is so they can look towards a future of self-dependency and it is the organisation's intention to extend this support to more.

The Rana Plaza building collapse is not an isolated phenomenon. There have been many industrial accidents worldwide since the beginning of the 18th century.

Technical flaws in the plants' constructions, slow development of democratic forms and norms and lack of good governance saw a rise in the number of industrial disasters.

It is no surprise then that industrial disasters began to decline rapidly once the solidarity of workers, democratisation of society and the rule of law were put into place.

The Rana Plaza collapse came only five months after the fire accident in Tazreen Factory, which killed 112 people.

It's easy to look at the headlines and the numbers and move on with our lives, but the lives that changed forever cannot move on so easily.

The assistance for a lot of the survivors needs to be for longer term and holistic if we want to truly rehabilitate them back into the workplace and society.

What local and international observers place a lot of emphasis on are the issues within the garments industry, from workers' pay to buyers' unrealistic demands.

The truth is the building was not safe and there are many more buildings in Bangladesh built with the same disregard for rules and regulations.

If a building not housed with factories but with apartments were to collapse next, what corporations would there be to blame?

The survivors and bereaved families affected by the Rana Plaza collapse do not deserve to wait for the dust of the blame game to settle; they deserve to see solutions and second chances to be self-dependent.

For this to happen, a renewed push with their current needs in mind is absolutely crucial.

Diversify exports, trade partners for better growth: PRI

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The policy to provide duty-free inputs for exports is not a privilege but a requirement for all production in order to be on a level playing field with global competitors, he said.

Export success needs a policy environment with no anti-export bias, he said. Ahsan H Mansur, executive director of PRI, said investment in infrastructure will help create immediate domestic demand and at the same time, lay the foundation for catalysing higher private sector investment.

The government has rightly adopted a number of high-profile projects for implementation on a priority basis; the project list needs to be expanded, prioritised and implemented, he said.

Alleviate land constraint for industrialisation by establishing a series of

Special Economic Zones (SEZs) in various parts of Bangladesh through public private partnerships, he suggested.

Establishing SEZs will bring foreign investment that could help link Bangladesh to the global value chain and in the process, diversify its export base, said Khurshid Alam, operations director of PRI.

Zakir Ahmed Khan, director of PRI, said Bangladesh's growth has to be led by exports. The country should diversify its export basket, he said.

"There is a need for a comprehensive trade policy and it has to be open," said Selim Raihan, who teaches economics at Dhaka University.

The country should enhance the supply capacity of non-garment products, he said. "We should invest in infrastructure to increase competitiveness in global markets."

The aftermath of disaster

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All very well, but when it comes to compensation for the unfortunate Rana Plaza victims that all parties were found badly wanting: none of the Rana Plaza's victims have received the full amount of compensation they were promised, one year on.

While the government provided some financial support, the conduct of 14 of the 29 retailers that sourced from the five factories housed at Rana Plaza has been downright woeful.

IndustriALL, a global union federation, initiated the Rana Plaza Trust Fund to justly compensate the victims, for which a total of \$40 million is needed.

All the 29 retailers that sourced from the Rana Plaza factories are bound to contribute to the fund, but 14 have refused to do so. Other retailers, too, have been asked to underwrite the fund chaired by the International Labour Organisation, but a major part of North American retailers did not express any willingness to participate.

British retailer Primark has been the biggest contributor, putting in a total of \$12 million for the victims. The other 14 firms have pledged to make donations at some point to the trust

fund, which has so far collected \$15 million.

The exigency of compensation becomes all the more desperate when one takes a look at the inhumane lives that many of the survivors are leading as a result of the accident.

Some of the injured have become permanently disabled, turning the once breadwinners of the families to suddenly become dependents or, in practical terms, burden for their poor families.

These families should be bestowed the means to stop them from falling into the trap of abject poverty -- a thing they were trying to negotiate with on a daily basis in the first place with their incomes from the cut-sew-trim business.

But what is criminally unfortunate about the tragedy is although 1,135 lives perished, nobody was put behind bars for allowing the illegal structure to be constructed, factories to be set up in the illegal building and forcing workers to join work even when it became evident that the disaster was looming large.

Going forward, the government will have to make negligence and indifference costly so that nobody ever fails to perform their duties to ensure a safe workplace --

Survivors struggle a year after factory collapse

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"Given the level of their profits and the scale of what happened, it is not really acceptable," said Emma Harbour, an activist with the Clean Clothes Campaign, which pushes for garment workers' rights.

There are exceptions. Primark, the British discount retailer, has contributed \$1m to the fund and is giving \$7m directly to workers of New Wave Bottoms, their supplier. Loblaw, the Canadian supermarket chain, has also contributed \$3.3m. Retailers such as Gap and VF Corporation have donated, despite no links to Rana Plaza factories.

The fund, which is making an initial \$644 payout to all eligible workers or families, now has just \$7m in its coffers, and another \$1.3m in pledges; the Primark funds bring the total to just over \$15m.

However, half the western companies that used, or had recently used, Rana Plaza factories have not contributed. Some, like Benetton or Matalan, have donated to Brac, a nongovernmental development organisation, for programmes to help victims, or families that lost their main breadwinner.

But the ILO and labour activists say charitable services for victims cannot replace a transparent and equitable process of providing cash compensation to all.

"Compensation is an entitlement," says Gilbert Houngbo, ILO deputy director-general. "Charity has a key role to play supporting rehabilitation and other services but it is voluntary by nature and not a substitute for entitlement."

Harbour, the activist, says: "If brands want to support Brac that's fantastic, but it doesn't excuse them from taking responsibility of the impact of their sourcing practices that led to more than 1,000 people dying."

For Mosammat Afroza Begum, a 27-year-old mother of three, help can't come fast enough. The sole supporter of her children, Afroza suffered spinal injuries and cannot sit or stand for long periods. She depends on painkillers and sleeping pills to get through each day.

She is now begging for help from friends and neighbours and borrowing money to feed her children. Her debts have mounted to \$390; she does not know how she will ever repay them.

"If I go to ask anyone for help, they say go back to work and earn money," she says. "But I'm not healthy enough. If I look at the roof or get on any stairs, I start to feel like I'm falling down. I'm so dependent on medication; as soon as I stop taking it, I start to feel terrible. I'm very scared about the future."

Retailers shy away from compensation

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Chandra also said the amount disbursed to the victims from the Prime Minister's relief fund will not be merged with the trust fund. So far, a total of Tk 23.55 crore has been disbursed from the Prime Minister's fund.

But, Mikail Shipar, secretary to the ministry of labour and employment, said the money that has been disbursed so far from the Prime Minister's relief fund will be considered as compensation money.

"We do not have a plan for a separate compensation package," he added.

The highest compensation recommended by a national committee headed by MM Akash, an economics teacher at Dhaka University, is Tk 14.5 lakh.

গণপ্রজাতন্ত্রী বাংলাদেশ সরকার

জেলা প্রশাসকের কার্যালয়, ঢাকা
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পুনঃ নিলাম বিজ্ঞপ্তি

ঢাকা জেলার সাভার উপজেলার সাভার বাসস্ট্যান্ড সংলগ্ন 'রানাপ্লাজা' নামক ভবন ধ্বংসের পর মহামান্য হাইকোর্ট বিভাগের ২০১৩ সালের ৯ নং সুয়ে-মটো বুল এর আদেশ মতে উক্ত ভবনের মালিক সোহেল রানা ও উক্ত ভবনে স্থাপিত গার্মেন্টস মালিকগণের নিলামে অংশগ্রহণের সম্পত্তি একত্রে বা পৃথক পৃথক গ্রুপে ক্রয়ের জন্য সীলমোহরকৃত খামে দর আহ্বান করা যাচ্ছে।

| গ্রুপ | মালামালের বর্ণনা |
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| গ্রুপ নং-১ | ক্ষতিগ্রস্ত মটর ২০৫টি ক্ষতিগ্রস্ত সুইং মেশিন ২৩৫টি কাপড়ের রোল ৬৩০টি (ক্ষতিগ্রস্ত) কাপড়ের গাইট (পুটলি) ৫৫টি ক্রাপের মত এসি ৩টি |
| গ্রুপ নং-২ | বংশী নদীর ধারে স্থপকৃত ধ্বংস হওয়া রানা প্লাজা ভবনের কংক্রিট, লোহা এ্যালুমিনিয়াম, গার্মেন্টস ফ্যাক্টরীর মেশিনারিজ ও মালামাল এর রাবিশ ও ক্রাপ (যেখানে যে অবস্থায় আছে)। |
| গ্রুপ নং-৩ | আর এস টাওয়ারের পিছনে স্থপকৃত ধ্বংস হওয়া রানা প্লাজা ভবনের কংক্রিট, লোহা এ্যালুমিনিয়াম, গার্মেন্টস ফ্যাক্টরীর মেশিনারিজ ও মালামাল এর রাবিশ ও ক্রাপ (যেখানে যে অবস্থায় আছে)। |

শর্তাবলী

- অগ্রহী ব্যক্তি/প্রতিষ্ঠান কর্তৃক সাদা কাগজে বা নিজস্ব প্যাডে দর দাখিল করতে হবে।
- আগামী ১৪-০৫-২০১৪ তারিখ অফিস চলাকালে জেলা প্রশাসকের কার্যালয়ে রক্ষিত দরপত্র বাস্তবে দরপত্র দাখিল করতে হবে।
- দরপত্র খামের উপর গ্রুপ নং লিখতে হবে।
- উদ্ধৃত দর এর ২.৫% অর্থ যেকোন সিডিউল ব্যাংক এর ব্যাংক ড্রাফট/পে-অর্ডার এর মাধ্যমে জেলা প্রশাসক, ঢাকা এর অনুকূলে সোনালী ব্যাংক লি. ডিস্ট্রিক্ট কাউন্সিল হল শাখায় দাখিল করতে হবে।
- উদ্ধৃত দর অংকে ও কথায় লিখতে হবে, তাতে কোনরূপ কাটাকাটি, ঘষা-মাজা বা অস্পষ্টতা থাকতে পারবে না।
- প্রযোজ্য ক্ষেত্রে বিধি মোতাবেক আয়কর, ভাট পরিশোধ করতে হবে।
- সর্বোচ্চ দরদাতার দর গ্রহণ করা বা না করার এখতিয়ার কর্তৃপক্ষ সংরক্ষণ করেন।
- নিলামকৃত মালামাল স্থানান্তরকালে কোন পাসপোর্ট, দলিল, টাকা, স্বর্ণালংকার ইত্যাদি পাওয়া গেলে তা কর্তৃপক্ষের নিকট দাখিল করতে হবে।

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AB Bank
Vice Chairman
Salim Ahmed
Re-elected

Mr. Salim Ahmed has been re-elected as the Vice Chairman of the Board of Directors of AB Bank Limited at the Board Meeting held on April 21, 2014.

Mr. Salim Ahmed, the Vice Chairman of the Bank is a renowned industrialist of the country. He has been associated with Paint, Chemical and Petro-chemical industries for a long time. Mr. Ahmed is the Managing Director of Elite Group of Companies and the President of Bangladesh Paint Manufacturing Association. He is also deeply connected with a wide range of social activities.