

Stalemate over garment factory safety

THE NEW YORK TIMES

Eight times now, the European-dominated Accord on Fire and Building Safety in Bangladesh—a group of more than 150 retailers and brands—has forced the temporary closing of garment factories after its inspectors found dangerous conditions.

But from the time the inspections began, tensions have been growing between the Accord and the Bangladeshi apparel industry, resulting in an impasse over a recent attempt to shutter what the Accord considers an unsafe factory building that houses Florence Fashions. And this time, as on several previous occasions, the Bangladeshi government has aligned with a garment manufacturer opposed to having its factory closed, even temporarily.

The series of inspections through more than 1,000 of the country's apparel factories has been emotionally freighted from the start, with workers, manufacturers, building owners and government officials watching the process with conflicting sentiments.

Of course, many Bangladeshis recognise the need for these inspections, and for some dangerous factories to be closed, as part of a broad-based effort to prevent another disaster like the Rana Plaza building collapse

that killed 1,138 workers in April 2013.

But factory closings can have immediate economic impact. Some factory owners worry about losing large and profitable orders to other companies and countries, and garment workers themselves fear losing their jobs. In one of the first closings after an Accord inspection, workers took to the streets in a raucous demonstration, protesting that their wages might not be paid.

Created a little more than a year ago to ensure worker safety in Bangladesh, the Accord has moved at a steady pace with inspections. It has hired 110 engineers and inspected 775 factories for structural soundness, unsafe electrical boxes, adequate fire exits and sprinkler systems—a new requirement for factory buildings 75 feet or taller.

Somewhat paralleling the Accord, two dozen American and Canadian companies, including Walmart and Gap, have formed the Alliance for Bangladesh Worker Safety. That group has inspected 601 factories, and has had five of them fully or partly closed because of the safety problems found, its officials say.

But in numerous cases where hazardous conditions were uncovered, the groups have confronted considerable resistance to closing a factory building altogether, and to the notion that a building should be closed as soon as possible.

In the case that has caused friction these last several months, a 10-story building in Dhaka containing Florence Fashions houses five factories, two of which produce garments for retailers that belong to the Accord: Florence, with 800 employees, and Cherry Private Limited.

Engineers at the Accord originally called for the factories in the building to be closed after they inspected Cherry—and Cherry's managers quickly agreed to close until recommended safety improvements were made.

But Florence declined to close, although it complied with the Accord's request to cease making goods produced there for any Accord member—like Mavi, a Turkish company. Florence has continued production for other, non-Accord buyers.

Rob Wayss, the Accord's executive director for Bangladesh, said his group—which includes H&M, Carrefour and many other prominent companies—has been trying to get the factory closed since an inspection in March.

The engineers "determined that in its current state, the building wasn't safe for people to be in," Wayss said.

Brad Loewen, the chief inspector for the Accord, put it in more dire terms, saying that he feared a collapse could occur. "The exact safety problem was

too much weight, too much of a load, on the support columns," he said.

But Florence's director, Mohammad Monirul Islam, said in an interview that the Accord had never formally presented his company with papers specifying what safety problems were uncovered.

"The Accord told us to shut down the factory instantly without giving any solution," Islam said in an interview this week at his factory. "The Accord did not give us any report after inspecting our factory. They did not give us any notice after the inspection."

Accord officials said they had met face-to-face with Florence's executives and sent them emails describing the problems. Islam said factories in the building had removed their storage loads after inspectors said the loads needed to be reduced immediately.

"When there's a structural inspection, when the building is found to be unsafe, it's unsafe for everyone in the building," Wayss said. "The building should be evacuated for everyone."

The Accord called on a Bangladeshi government review panel to confirm its recommendation that Florence Fashions be closed, but Accord officials said the government declined to order a shutdown even though the panel agreed with the findings.

In an interview, Syed Ahmed, the inspector general for Bangladesh's

Department of Inspection for Factories and Establishments, said his department had not received the proper request and records from the Accord to justify closing Florence.

Ahmed said he learned about the Accord's desire to close Florence only from the Accord's website. He said the safety findings detailed on the site were not official or binding on him.

Loewen, the Accord's chief inspector, said his group's engineers had met with Ahmed and managers of the factories in the building—and later wrote to them—about urgent safety problems after the initial inspection of the Cherry factory.

A group of retailers and brands considers the building that houses Florence unsafe, but the manufacturer has declined to close.

"As far as they're saying they were never informed, the inspector general and Florence were at the table right from the get-go," Loewen said. "They're being a little cute."

Wayss, the executive director, added, "It doesn't seem quite honest for them to say they don't know what's happening."

In the months since the inspections started, some factory owners and government officials have grown resentful of the Accord's methods and accused the group's officials and engineers of being highhanded and

seeking to dictate to them. But the government, under agreements with the Accord, is supposed to order any factories closed where conditions have been deemed unsafe by engineers and confirmed by a review panel.

The Accord, unlike the Alliance, has some large labour federations and nongovernmental organisations as members, and the Accord has often taken a tougher stance toward the government and the Bangladeshi garment manufacturers. The Accord recently tussled with the government over the strength required for concrete support pillars. Some Accord board members say the Bangladeshi garment industry has had too much sway over the government; for years, the industry fought against rigorous government regulations or inspections.

Worsening tensions, the Bangladeshi commerce minister and the head of the Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association accused Bangladeshi union leaders this week of undermining the nation's image and garment industry by asserting that some labour leaders and pro-union workers have been tortured, beaten and harassed. Atiqul Islam, president of the manufacturers' association, said in a speech on Monday in Dhaka that the labour leaders' complaints were subversive to the state, adding that the



A Rouf Chowdhury, chairman of Bank Asia, presides over the ninth extraordinary general meeting of the bank in Dhaka yesterday. Md Mehmod Husain, managing director, was also present.

Govt plans survey to stop loss of arable land

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Rahman shared the plan at a programme on in-depth country assessment of agricultural and rural statistics at the BBS office in Dhaka. The national statistical agency and Food and Agricultural Organisation co-organised the event.

Bangladesh lost 13,412 hectares of cropland annually during 1976-2000. The amount of land going out of cultivation soared to 687,000 hectares a year during 2000-2010, according to a study by Soil Resource Development Institute under the agriculture ministry.

Cropland decreased by 0.73 percent annually to stand at 87.51 lakh hectares in 2010 from 94.39 lakh hectares in 2000. Rahman said the survey would be conducted involving various agencies and land surveyors.

Rajiv Mehta, an international consultant of the FAO, said some of the crop statistics here are robust. "Some need to be improved," he said, citing livestock, forestry and fisheries.

He said data on agro processing, commodity prices, food stocks, food balance sheet and environment are not collected or partially collected. Statistics on forestry, trade, pesticides and seeds are generated through administrative processes. Mehta said the methodology of data collection on fisheries, water use, land and rural infrastructure lacks soundness.

He suggested formulation of a strategic plan to improve agricultural and rural statistics and strengthening crop estimation system, including forecasting and monitoring for important crops. He also called for an integrated framework of census and surveys for agriculture and rural sectors covering crops, livestock, fisheries, inland water bodies and such related areas.

Bidhan Baral, project director of Harmonisation and Dissemination of Unified Agricultural Production Statistics at the BBS, said the reliability of rice production estimates has been ensured after adoption of a new methodology.

New company to get telecom transmission licence

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Before that, the regulator used to issue licences.

"Our target is to lay the optical fibre cable network in 64 districts within the next three to five years so that the mobile, WiMax or internet service providers can get connectivity," said Syed Samiul Huq, managing director of Bahon.

The other shareholders of Bahon are Syed Ruhul Huq, chairman, Salma Islam, a director, and Farzana Lucky Ali, a director, according to its application.

Prime Bank picks head of exec body



Quazi Sirazul Islam

STAR BUSINESS DESK

Quazi Sirazul Islam has recently been elected as the chairman of Prime Bank's executive committee for a two-year term.

Islam is a sponsor director and former chairman of Prime Bank. He also serves Amin Jewelers as managing director and Sonar Bangla Insurance as chief adviser.

At the same time, Imran Khan has been elected as the committee's vice chairman, the bank said in a statement yesterday.

Khan is one of the directors of Pedrollo nk Ltd, the Bangladeshi subsidiary of Pedrollo. He is also a director of PNL Holdings, PNL Water Management, PolyexPrint, Polyexlaminat, Polypaste, Halda Valley Tea Co, and Hill Plantation.

GP re-launches service centre in Ctg

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Chittagong

Bangladesh cricket team all-rounder Nasir Hossain yesterday re-launched Grameenphone Centre at GEC in Chittagong city.

The outlet is one of the most preferred GP service experience zones for local customers.

Shah Mohammad Ibrahim Azad, GP's Chittagong regional head, and Mohammad Ziaul Huda, head of GEC centre, also attended the event in Nasirabad.

Customers met Nasir during the daylong event and 10 lucky customers had dinner with Nasir at Peninsula Hotel in the city. Nasir is a brand ambassador of Grameenphone.

Fifth Social Business Day tomorrow

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Andrea Jung, president and CEO of Grameen America, two delegations comprising 46 members from China, a 43-member delegation led by Danone Communities from France, a 15-member team led by Grameen Credit Agricole, a 30-member delegation from Taiwan, high-level representatives from NABARD, Tata Steel, Bajaj group from India are also scheduled to attend the event.

A social business design lab session will be held during the event where social businesses from five countries will be presented. There will be a Social Business Marketplace showcasing social businesses from around the world.

A highlight of the day will be special circus performance by Phare Social Business Circus from Cambodia which trains street children to become modern circus artists.

On July 2, additional events will be organised, including Social Business Academia event by Dhaka International University, Social Business and Youth by Eastern University and Social Business Youth Summit by Social Business Youth Network.

Professor Yunus will be the keynote speaker of these events, according to the statement.

Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh

Department of Disaster Management (DDM)

Ministry of Disaster Management & Relief

Disaster Management Bhaban

92-93, Mohakhali C/A, Dhaka-1212

Website: www.ddm.gov.bd, Phone: 9859637

Date: June 23, 2014

Invitation of Request for Expressions of Interest (REOI) for Hiring Individual Consultant (National) for the Post of MRVA and MIS, GIS Specialist for the Project ECRRP-D1 under DDM

The People's Republic of Bangladesh has received a Credit (IDA Credit No. 4507-BD) from the International Development Association (IDA) towards the cost of Emergency 2007 Cyclone Recovery and Restoration Project (ECRRP), Sub-Component-D1: Disaster Risk Mitigation & Reduction, DDM (2008-2015) and intends to apply part of the proceeds of the credit to eligible payments under the contracts. The positions of the Individual Consultant (IC) will be filled in at the Project Office of ECRRP-D1, DDM located at Mohakhali, Dhaka. Detailed description of services, qualifications and experiences of the Individual Consultant has been mentioned in the TOR, attached in the SRFA. The expertise necessary to provide the services by the following IC has been mentioned in short:

Sl. No.	Position	No. of Post	Qualification and Experiences
1	MRVA and MIS, GIS Specialist	1 (one)	<p>i) Preferably an advanced university degree (Masters or equivalent) in disciplines such as disaster management, engineering, geography, urban and regional planning, Computer Science and Engineering, Geo Information Technology. Certification on Cisco Certified Network Administrator (CCNA) and Microsoft Certified System Engineer (MCSE) will be an additional plus point. Advance international degree in GIS such as geo-informatics, Geo-information Science and Earth observation, remote sensing, Development Studies will be also highly preferred.</p> <p>ii) Minimum 10 years experience in the design, execution and/or management of multi-hazard risk and vulnerability assessments, modeling and mapping; extensive use of GIS, field data surveys - preferably including some international experience: (a) About six years of proven track record in mapping and database development, as well as performing spatial data analysis using a GIS platform and (b) about four years of relevant working experience in development and implementation of ICT/MIS strategies, management and supervision of ICT/MIS services and teams, hardware and software platforms, telecommunications facilities.</p> <p>iii) Experience on climate change, development planning or disaster risk reduction issues, particularly on mainstreaming efforts will be an advantage.</p> <p>iv) Experience in conducting research on the use of GIS and remote sensing in related applications will be an advantage.</p> <p>v) Proactive and able to work with minimal supervision and a high degree of initiative, reliability, flexibility, motivation, and resourcefulness.</p> <p>vi) Ability to deal sensitively in a multicultural environment and function effectively in diverse and multi-disciplinary teams.</p> <p>vii) Ability to integrate different experiences, methodologies, and approaches.</p> <p>viii) Excellent team player, with strong client and results orientation.</p>

Candidate should have ability to work in a multi-disciplinary team environment, ability to work independently under pressure & time bound, working experience in donor assisted projects and have proficiency in computer literacy and English (both oral and written). The individual Consultant will be appointed initially for one year (12 months), further extension will be made on the basis of performance for another six months or up to the project period. Salary: Negotiable.

The Project Director of ECRRP-D1 now invites eligible individual Consultants to indicate their interest in providing the required services. Interested Consultants must provide information indicating that they are qualified to perform the services in the position. The applicants have to collect the "Standard Request for Application (SRFA)" from the office of the undersigned or websites to prepare the application. In addition to that, the intending candidates should attach 01 (one) copy of photograph and 01 (one) photocopy each of all degrees/certificates, training and experience certificates along with the original application. The candidate must have submit 03 (three) copies of CV (1 original+2 copies) to the undersigned. Only the short-listed candidates will be called for interview.

Individual consultant will be selected in accordance with the Public Procurement Rules (PPR) 2008. Expressions of interest shall be submitted in sealed envelope, clearly marked "Request for Expressions of Interest for the position of MRVA and MIS, GIS Specialist" on the top of the envelope and delivered to the address below on or before July 21, 2014 during office hours.

Dildar Ahmed

Director (Joint Secretary) and Project Director, CERRP-D1

Department of Disaster Management (DDM)

Disaster Management Bhaban (4th Floor)

92-93, Mohakhali C/A, Dhaka-1212, Bangladesh

Commodity imports see a big jump

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Besides, LCs opened for importing onion increased by 78 percent and LCs have been opened for \$165 million for importing the spice used for preparing iftar items.

Annual demand for onion is 22 lakh tonnes. In the last season, the country produced 13.58 lakh tonnes of onion. Onion is imported mainly from India through land ports.

On average, 200 tonnes of onion are imported a day, the ministry officials said.

Local onions were selling at 3.85

percent lower than in the previous year, while the prices of the imported variety marked a rise of 4.84 percent yesterday, according to the TCB report.

In the first 10 months of the current fiscal year, sugar import was 1.77 percent higher from the corresponding period last year, but the LC opening increased by around 30 percent and LCs were opened for around \$665 million.

LC opening for import of sugar soared on the eve of Ramadan, a commerce ministry official said.

Annual demand for sugar is 14.5

lakh tonnes. Sugar prices fell 4 percent to Tk 46-48 a kg yesterday from the previous year.

LCs opened for refined edible oil went up about 30 percent in the first 10 months of 2013-14 from the same period last year, and LCs worth \$455 million were opened for importing different varieties of edible oil, according to the central bank.

However, LCs opened for crude edible oil amounted to \$700 million though it was about 22 percent lower than in the same period last fiscal year.

An intelligence agency has already identified the spots where extortion takes place, he said. "The list has been sent to the home ministry for taking necessary

GD-2627