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Star BUSINESS

DHAKA THURSDAY APRIL 23, 2015, e-mail:business@thedailystar.net

Rana Plaza survivors left in the lurch

ActionAid survey paints gloomy picture

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Some 55 percent of the Rana Plaza survivors are still unemployed, two years after the nation's worst industrial disaster, due to physical inability, trauma or lack of suitable jobs, a recent survey by ActionAid Bangladesh found.

On the flipside, about 44 percent of the survivors managed to get gainfully employed in various sectors, according to the survey, which was unveiled yesterday at a programme organised at the capital's Brac Centre Inn.

ActionAid, an international non-governmental organisation, had the biggest sample size among all the surveys conducted on the disaster that claimed 1,135 lives and injured 2,500.

It covered 2,200 victims, of which 1,414 were survivors and 786 family members of the dead.

SURVEY HIGHLIGHTS

- 55% survivors jobless
- 35% have returned to garment sector
- Conditions of 22.6% survivors worse
- 60% survivors suffering from trauma

Of the survivors that were surveyed, 915 were women and 499 men.

Of the respondents, 69 percent said they are unable to return to regular work because of physical weakness, 7 percent for trauma and 15 percent for lack of suitable jobs.

Only 35 percent of the survivors have returned to the garment sector.

The survey showed 76 percent of the survivors earned less than Tk 5,300 a month in wages or from petty business.

Of the survivors, 70.6 percent responded that they were somewhat healed, while an alarming 22.6 percent said their condition was getting worse.

Many of the injured workers need long-term treatment, which they are not receiving at the moment, said Aamanur Rahman, a deputy director of ActionAid Bangladesh, while making a presentation.

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Grameen Bank director challenges legality of a govt notice

The finance ministry notice declared the posts of nine elected directors vacant

ASHUTOSH SARKAR

A writ petition has been filed with the High Court challenging the legality of a government notice that declared the posts of nine elected directors of Grameen Bank vacant.

Tahsina Khatun, a former elected director, submitted the petition on April 6, seeking a stay on the notice issued by the finance ministry.

The ministry sent the notice to the government-appointed chairman of Grameen Bank on March 30, saying the posts of the nine elected directors of the microlender have become vacant since their three-year tenure expired on February 7 this year.

The notice said the chairman along with two other directors nominated by the government will now be sufficient to hold meetings of the board of the bank.

Challenging the ministry's decision, Tahsina stated in her petition that the posts of the nine elected directors would be vacant after the election commission announces the polls schedule to select their replacements, as stated in Grameen Bank (Director Election) Rules 2014.

But the government has not yet appointed the election commission, let alone announce the election schedule. As a result, the posts of the nine elected directors cannot be declared vacant, she said.

The petitioner also said the finance ministry has issued the notice to the Grameen Bank chairman illegally.

Deputy Attorney General Amatul Karim Swapna, however, told The Daily Star that there was no illegality in the finance ministry's notice to the Grameen Bank chairman.

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BTRC to launch hotline to receive complaints

MUHAMMAD ZAHIDUL ISLAM

The telecom regulator has taken an initiative to ensure the quality of services, allocating a dedicated number to help users lodge complaints.

The 24-hour number is 01555121121, according to an official of Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission.

The number will officially be launched next week after Sunil Kanti Bose, chairman of the BTRC, returns from abroad.

The regulator also formed three committees last week to ensure the quality of services of fixed line internet and the committee members are already visiting

different sites.

"We have started our regulatory process to ensure the quality of internet and telecom services for the end users and hope these initiatives will improve the situation," Md Sarwar Alam, secretary of the BTRC, said yesterday.

The committees will give their reports soon and the telecom watchdog will go for further action accordingly, he added.

Mobile phone operators have welcomed the initiatives and said, although they have a modern complaints lodging system, the BTRC initiative will further help the industry.

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NBR assesses scope to revive property tax

SOHEL PARVEZ

The National Board of Revenue weighs the possibility of reintroducing property taxes to ensure a more equitable distribution of wealth and reduce economic disparity, a senior official of NBR said yesterday.

The move comes after Finance Minister AMA Muhiht asked the tax administration to see whether the wealth tax could be resumed, instead of a surcharge on wealth.

The NBR withdrew the wealth tax in 1999; it imposed a surcharge on wealth worth over Tk 2 crore in fiscal 2011-12.

"We are working on it. It requires detailed scrutiny because it is a major decision," said a tax official seeking anonymity. The matter would be discussed in detail prior to framing the budget for the next fiscal year.

The NBR official was however less optimistic about the outcome if the wealth tax is imposed. "Litigations related to the valuation of wealth are a problem," he said, adding that India abolished the measure, particularly for this reason. Early this year, the neighbouring country stopped the wealth tax and levied an extra 2 percent surcharge on the super rich, according to reports in Indian media.

The NBR collector logged Tk 208 crore in surcharge on wealth in fiscal 2013-14 from 10,152 individuals who have a net wealth of more than Tk 2 crore. The collection was Tk 101 crore in the previous year, according to NBR.

But taxmen and analysts said the number of the wealthy people will rise if the government calculates the value of lands and apartments on the basis of present market prices.

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Apparel working conditions still poor: HRW

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Garment workers in Bangladesh still face poor working conditions and anti-union tactics by employers, including assaults on union organisers, Human Rights Watch (HRW) said in a report released in Dhaka yesterday.

In the two years since more than 1,100 workers died in the collapse of the Rana Plaza factory building on April 24, 2013, efforts are underway to make Bangladeshi factories safer.

But the government and Western retailers can and should do more to enforce international labour standards to protect workers' rights, including their right to form unions and advocate for better conditions.

"If Bangladesh wants to avoid another Rana Plaza disaster, it needs to effectively enforce its labour law and ensure that garment workers enjoy the right to voice their concerns about safety and working conditions without fear of retaliation or dismissal," said Phil Robertson, Asia deputy director of HRW.

"If Bangladesh does not hold accountable the factory managers who attack workers and deny the right to form unions, the government will perpetuate practices that have cost the lives of thousands of workers."

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We Mourn

We are deeply shocked and saddened by the tragic death of our banking colleague, Md. Waliullah, Manager of Bangladesh Commerce Bank Limited's (BCBL) Kathgora Bazar Branch, Ashulia, Dhaka on April 21, 2015. We pray for the eternal salvation of his departed soul. May the bereaved family have the strength to bear this irreparable loss with fortitude. We also offer our sympathies to all his colleagues at BCBL.

Sincerely,
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