

# BB announces aid for bank robbery victims

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Bangladesh Bank will give Tk 1 lakh to each family of those killed in a daring heist at a bank branch in the garment manufacturing hub of Ashulia on Tuesday, Governor Atiur Rahman said.

Eight persons, including the branch manager, were killed in the incident that took place in broad daylight.

The central bank governor, in a condolence letter to Bangladesh Commerce Bank, expressed sympathy for all those killed, especially the manager, Waliullah Subin, who sacrificed his life to protect the keys to the bank's vault.

Ordinary people had also risked their lives to defy the robbers, Rahman said. The central bank will give the grants from its corporate social responsibility fund.

SK Sur Chowdhury, deputy governor of the central bank, said Commerce Bank has been directed to pay compensation to the families of those killed and arrange proper treatment for the injured.

The bank has also primarily decided to give one days' salary of the bank's staff that amounts to around Tk 10 lakh to the family of the branch manager, said Abu Sadek Md Sohel, its managing director.

Financial assistance will be given to all victims, including the security guard who was not part of the staff, from the bank's CSR fund, he added.

The branch manager left behind his wife, who is a homemaker, and four children.

Sohel said the bank's board will later decide on future assistance.

# Qualitative research found wanting: adviser

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Developing skills is the key to conducting effective research, which is an important tool for finding solutions to problems, Prime Minister's International Affairs Adviser Gowher Rizvi said yesterday.

At present, the local institutes' contribution of qualitative and quantitative research is found wanting, which can partly be attributable to the absence of resources, he said.

"Our research capacity has not been developed sufficiently. I don't mean to say there is no good institution to be found here -- in fact, there are a good number of them. But the skills and training that are required for conducting research is inadequate."

"To do that, we need to develop our research skills. We need more post-graduate courses and more think-tanks, as opposed to desktop research

and consultancy type of research."

Rizvi's comments came at a seminar styled "Horizon 2020, from the lab to the market: cooperation on research and innovation between EU and Bangladesh", jointly organised by the European Union delegation to the country and Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies (BISS) at the capital's Westin hotel.

He said no difficulties or problems can be solved from a single perspective. Even no scholar, save for an outstanding one, can solve a problem on his/her own.

"Diverse people from diverse sectors come together to solve a question, whether it is related with poverty, technology, environment and climate changes -- whatever it is, we need a combined effort from diverse disciplines."

He also urged local researchers and institutions to collaborate with their

counterparts from around the world.

"We will have to be tested. We will have to compare our work with those from around the world."

Presenting a keynote at the seminar, Denis Dambois, regional counsellor on research and innovation of the EU delegation to India, said the 'horizon 2020' is one of the largest and most open public research and innovation programmes in the world and around 80 billion euros are allocated for it.

Between 2007 and 2013, 17 research teams from Bangladesh were included in 15 projects.

The most active Bangladeshi participants are: Brac University, International Centre for Diarrhoeal Disease Research, Bangladesh and the Institute of Water Modelling.

Pierre Mayaudon, head of the EU delegation to Bangladesh, and Munshi Faiz Ahmed, chairman of BISS, also spoke at the seminar.

# Padma Life's directors fined for breach of rules

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

The insurance regulator yesterday fined Padma Life Insurance's board members, including its chairman, for violating laws relating to the appointment of a chief executive officer.

In a statement, the Insurance Development and Regulatory Authority (IDRA) said each director of the 20-member board has been fined Tk 1 lakh each for the violation.

IDRA gave the verdict after a hearing on the issue on April 1 with its Chief Shefaque Ahmed in the chair.

The statement said Padma Life Insurance has failed to recruit a chief executive even after one year, when the post became vacant on March 19, 2014. IDRA had issued a letter to the insurer in May last year to appoint a chief executive.

Later in December, IDRA asked for an explanation on why a chief executive was not recruited. The life insurer sought three more months to make the recruitment.

In January this year, Padma sent a letter to IDRA seeking its prior approval to appoint Mohammad Wasiuddin as its chief executive, but the regulator declined to give its nod as the individual did not have the required qualities stipulated in the insurance regulations.

Finally, IDRA fined all 20 directors of Padma's board for their negligence in protecting the interests of the policy and shareholders.



Mominul Haque and Soumya Sarkar, national team cricketers, pose with Zubair BA Siddiky, managing director of Foodpanda, during the signing of an endorsement agreement, at Sonargaon Hotel in Dhaka recently.



Md Rezaul Haque, chairman of Social Islami Bank, opens the bank's ATM booth at its corporate office in Motijheel, Dhaka yesterday. Salman Obaidul Karim, managing director of Orion Group, was also present.



Extreme left, Daniel Seidl, executive director of Bangladesh German Chamber of Commerce and Industry, speaks at the 11th German CSR Forum, at Stuttgart in Germany held over April 20 and 21. Bangladeshi labour leader Nazma Akter was also present.

# Rana Plaza survivors left in the lurch

FROM PAGE B1

While they received adequate health services in the first six months of the building's collapse, that support started petering out after that period.

"Now, the injured workers have run out of money. As a result, they are not being able to take any treatment."

Over 61 percent of the injured workers need to visit doctors, particularly for diagnosis, prescription for medication and physiotherapy, according to the survey.

On average, each person spends about Tk 1,600 a month for treatment and medicine, with the cost borne by them.

About 60 percent of the survivors surveyed are still suffering from depression and trauma, while 34.2 percent said they have somewhat recovered from the psychological impact.

The report said 30 percent of the survivors have more than five dependents and 16.69 percent have three to four mouths to feed.

At present, less than one-third of the survivors are able to support their families, though in a limited capacity.

Of the respondents, 54.4 percent are facing a lot of difficulties meeting their daily needs, while 2 percent said they are unable to make ends meet at all.

Subsequently, the survivors and family members of the dead called for financial aid to start their own businesses or invest in their existing family businesses or as a support during job search in sectors other than garment.

More than half of the respondents asked for compensation from the brands and other stakeholders.

Many believe putting the persons responsible for the collapse behind bars would provide justice for the victims of the disaster.

In recommendations, ActionAid said realisation and delivery of full compensa-

tion are required to address the mid-term and long-term needs. If compensation is not realised, the progression of vulnerability will be accelerated, it said.

Further health and livelihood support to the survivors is required so they can resume normal lives and careers, said the report.

Jahangir Alam, one of the survivors of the industrial disaster, was present at the programme.

He managed to find a job in another garment factory after the fateful event on April 24, 2013 but could not hold on to it. "One day, when the power went off I started screaming out of fear. I thought the Rana Plaza event was playing out again. I lost the job."

Alam, whose body shakes when he speaks, said the situation is such that no garment factory wants to take on the Rana Plaza survivors.

In light of this, the compensation package should take account of the lifetime income that the survivors have to forgo, he added.

Nilufar Yasmin, another survivor, said they want adequate compensation so they can lead decent lives and bear the educational expenses of their children.

Farah Kabir, country director of ActionAid Bangladesh, said all of these survivors had come to work. "Now they are not being able to work because of psychological and physical difficulties. So, we have to think whether we are doing enough for them."

She said the injured victims are not taking the required medicines as they do not have the wherewithal. "As a result, they are not being able to reach a stage where they can start to work again."

Israfil Alam, a member of the parliamentary standing committee on labour ministry, said a lot of promises were made after the tragic event but many of them were not kept.

The debate over compensation should come to an end by fixing the mode of payment,

hesaid.

The ruling party lawmaker is sceptical that the victims would get their due justice: the persons whose negligence led to the collapse are very powerful.

Shahidullah Azim, vice-president of Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association, said the platform has taken responsibility of 45 children of the deceased and surviving workers. "We want to take in more children but their guardians are reluctant."

Tuomo Poutiainen, a programme manager of the International Labour Organisation, said a lot has been done in the last two years but the job is not finished yet.

"Everybody has a shared responsibility to continue to support the victims," he said, adding that the UN body is also working to ensure that disasters such as Rana Plaza do not recur.

He added that the responsibility to ensure workplace safety lies with the government, factory owners and other stakeholders. "There has to be improvement to governance, transparency and access to justice."

Syed Ahmed, inspector general of the Department of Inspection for Factories and Establishments, said while there are problems with many of the buildings, the number of structures facing risks of collapse is only two percent.

Mojtaba Kazazi, executive commissioner of Rana Plaza Coordination Committee (RPCC), said 2,871 claims have been received from the injured workers, dependents of the deceased and missing workers.

Of them, 2,839 claims were reviewed and authorised for payments. The remaining 32 claims along with the 20-30 additional deceased claims that are yet to be filled will be included in the final instalment, he said.

About Tk 76 crore have so far been paid to the injured workers and dependents of the deceased and missing workers, according to the RPCC executive commissioner.

# Apparel working conditions still poor: HRW

FROM PAGE B1

The 78-page report -- Whoever Raises Their Head, Suffers the Most: Workers' Rights in Bangladesh's Garment Factories -- is based on interviews with more than 160 workers from 44 factories, most of them making garments for retailers in North America, Europe and Australia.

The interviews were conducted between October 2013 and April 2015 and the report was published at a press conference at Dhaka Reporters Unity.

Workers report violations including physical assault, verbal abuse -- sometimes of a sexual nature -- forced overtime, denial of paid maternity leave, and failure to pay wages and bonuses on time or in full.

Despite the recent labour law reforms, many workers who try to form unions to address such abuse face threats, intimidation, dismissal, and sometimes physical assault at the hands of factory management or hired third parties, the report said.

While changes to some labour laws since the Rana Plaza incident, including provisions easing the union registration process, have facilitated registration of new unions, still fewer garment factories in Bangladesh have unions.

After the Rana Plaza collapse, around 300 trade unions received registration, which is less than 3 percent of the total garment factories in the country, said Alonzo Suson, Bangladesh country director of Solidarity Centre.

The rejection rate in trade union applications by the labour ministry has also increased in recent times; the rate was 19 percent in 2013, 31 percent in 2014 and 56 percent in January-April this year, he said. "It's very concerning."

Union leaders told the HRW that they continue to be targeted by factory management, risking abuse by both managers and supervisors, or thugs acting at their behest, according to the report.

In some factories, workers leading efforts to form unions have been dismissed for their organising activities, said Babul Akhter, president of Bangladesh Garments and Industrial Workers Federation.

Workers are not getting any remedy after reporting such irregularities to Bangladesh Garment

Manufacturers and Exporters Association, Bangladesh Knitwear Manufacturers and Exporters Association and the labour ministry, he said.

The HRW called upon the government, factory owners, and Western retailers to ensure respect for workers' rights and end the unlawful targeting of labour leaders by factory owners and supervisors.

The government should carry out effective and impartial investigations into all workers' allegations of mistreatment, including beatings, threats, and other abuses, and prosecute those responsible, Robertson said.

The HRW report also examines the aftermath of the Rana Plaza and Tazreen Fashions disasters. Three separate initiatives to inspect the factories for safety are underway, by the Accord on Fire and Building Safety, the Alliance for Bangladesh Worker Safety, and by government inspectors, supported by the ILO.

Survivors told the HRW that the compensation they have received until now is not sufficient to pay their medical bills and cover their loss of livelihood.

An independent commission has estimated that \$30 million needs to be paid to the survivors of the Rana Plaza incident and the dependants of those who died. But only about \$21 million has been paid or pledged as of March 2015, it said.

For the victims of the Tazreen Fashions fire, the situation is worse in the absence of a sustained campaign for compensation, such as in the case of the Rana Plaza collapse.

In November 2014, European retailer C&A pledged a "significant amount towards full and fair compensation" for the victims of Tazreen, and the Hong-Kong-based company Li & Fung made a donation to support the victims soon after the disaster. However, several other companies have paid nothing, claiming the factory was making or storing their products without their knowledge or authorisation.

The apparel industry accounts for almost 80 percent of the country's export earnings and contributes to more than 10 percent of the gross domestic product, employing more than four million workers, a majority of whom are women.

# BTRC to launch hotline to receive complaints

FROM PAGE B1

"We have a 24/7 customer care service to receive and resolve customers' complaints. However, if a new initiative is taken to address customers' issues, we will welcome that," said Mahmud Hossain, chief corporate affairs officer of Grameenphone.

In the last week of March, State Minister for ICT Zunaid Ahmed Palak asked the regulator to set up a special monitoring arrangement to ensure the quality of services.

Palak also asked for a toll-free number or a short code to register complaints.

The number has already been uploaded on the personal Facebook page of a BTRC official, who has received some complaints in the first few hours.

The telecom regulator also collects end user complaints through e-mail (btrc@btrc.gov.org), but it is not so popular.

The regulator has met internet service providers and other operators to develop the quality of their services.

The regulator is also formulating a fresh consumer protection guideline, which will help subscribers receive quality services.

# NBR assesses scope to revive property tax

FROM PAGE B1

The number of wealthy people and their wealth will be higher from the viewpoint of property price spirals and a rise in the number of apartments and expensive cars, they said.

"The number is very low even for Dhaka city, let alone the entire country. It is likely that there are more than 10,000 apartment owners in the plush areas of the capital," Towfiqul Islam Khan, a research fellow at Centre for Policy Dialogue, told The Daily Star early this month.

"Land and apartments are undervalued in Bangladesh," he said, adding that people in the high-income segment also misrepresent the value of their property on paper.

# Grameen Bank director challenges legality of a govt notice

FROM PAGE B1

Meanwhile, the HC bench of Justice Farah Mahbub and Justice Kazi Md Ejarul Haque Akondo held the hearing on the petition on April 20 and 21. The hearing may resume today.

The 12-member Grameen Bank board is comprised of nine borrower-directors, who are elected every three years, and three government-nominated directors, one of whom serves as the chairman.

The expiry of the tenure of the borrower-directors has created a situation, for the first time since the bank's inception three decades ago, where borrowers, who own 75 percent shares of the bank, do not have any representation in the board.

"The borrower-shareholders are the real owners of the bank. A board where there is no representation of the borrowers can't be a board of Grameen Bank," Tahsina had told The Daily Star earlier.

# Shaky investors push stocks into the red

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

The key index of the Dhaka Stock Exchange settled near a 16 month-low yesterday as insecure investors kept offloading shares.

DSEX, the benchmark index of the premier bourse, finished the day at 4,252.94 points, shedding 30.3 points or 0.7 percent. The index closed at 4,209.69 points on December 29 in 2013.

"Lack of confidence and direction was clearly visible among the investors as the market showed a lot of volatility throughout the whole trading session," said Lanka Bangla Securities, a leading stockbroker.

The market kept on the reverse gear, wiping out investors' gain from risk taking. IDLC Investments said in its regular analysis. The retreat in stock prices pushed the index down, which hit the lowest since December 2013.