

Rana Plaza two-year anniversary

MARCIA BERNICAT

TWO years ago, the Rana Plaza building collapsed, crushing workers and drawing the world's attention to the readymade garment (RMG) sector in Bangladesh. In one day, Bangladesh lost over 1100 lives. Today we remember those workers and grieve their loss along with their families and friends. As we look to the future, we see that Bangladesh – its workers, employers, and government – is working alongside the world's brands and Bangladesh's international partners to prevent such a tragedy from ever happening again. Together, we are building a better and more productive RMG sector and demonstrating to the world that business success goes hand-in-hand with workers' rights and safety.

Bangladesh is not alone when it comes to surviving infamous factory tragedies. On March 25, 1911, in the United States, 146 workers died during a fire at the Triangle shirt factory. Similar to the workers at Rana Plaza, the Triangle shirt factory victims included many young women who had come to the factory to earn a salary for the first time. Like the Rana Plaza collapse, the Triangle shirt factory fire could have been prevented. The owners had locked the doors to the stairwells and exits, which prevented many of the workers from being able to escape the burning building. Instead, onlookers watched as young women jumped from the eighth, ninth, and tenth floors to their deaths on the streets below.

This tragedy led to enormous changes in the United States that included legislation requiring improved factory safety standards and the strengthening of the International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union. A Committee on Public Safety was formed, headed by Frances Perkins, who later became the first Secretary of Labour of the United States. The committee identified specific problems and supported new legislation including a bill to shorten the maximum hours in a work week. Field agents were hired to do on-site inspections of factories. New York City's Fire Chief John Kenlon told the investigators that his department had identified more than 200 factories with similar fire risks.

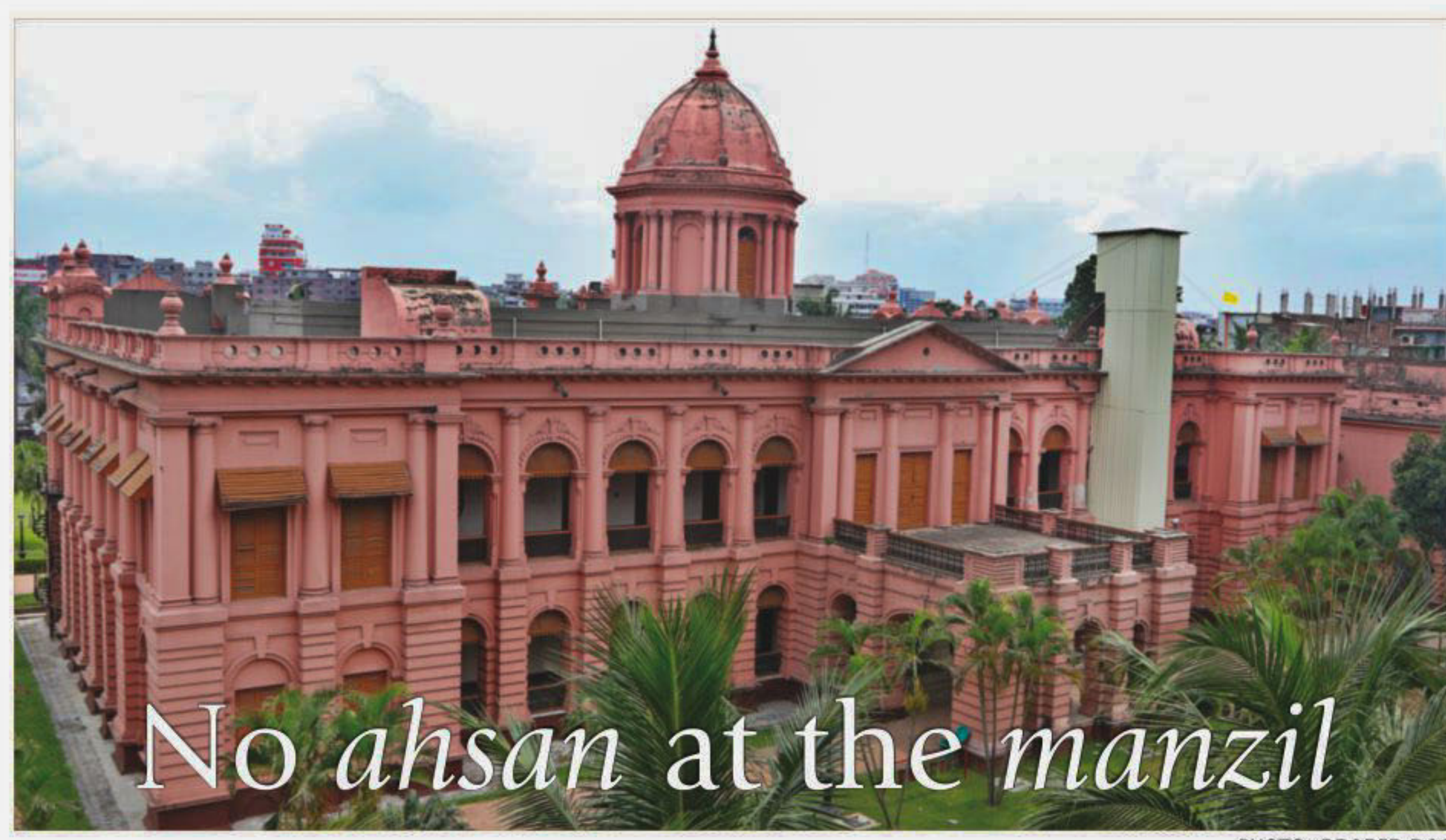
Change has similarly begun in Bangladesh to address factory safety concerns. Since Rana Plaza, over 2,700 factories have been inspected for fire, building and electrical safety, and 32 factories with dangerous conditions have

been closed. People from all over the world can access information about these inspections on the Ministry of Labor and Employment website. The ministry has hired and begun training over 100 inspectors. But the work is not done; over 1000 factories under the National Tripartite Action Plan have not been inspected. Other factories remain not registered; their conditions are unknown. We urge all of Bangladesh's stakeholders to ensure that all factories are safe.

The government of Bangladesh has also begun to show its leadership among industrialising nations by demonstrating its commitment to important labour rights standards. It has registered over 300 unions and created a website for unions to register online. We encourage the government to ensure these unions' members are able to exercise their legal right to collectively bargain, free from the fear that they will be fired or harassed, and that illegal retaliation will be dealt with quickly. We also would welcome the use of an alternative resolution system to prevent disputes between workers and management from escalating into conflict. We look forward to the new inspectors receiving training from the International Labour Organization and inspecting worksites for wage violations and other issues as mandated by the labour law. And by issuing the Labour Act's Implementing Rules, the government will soon provide employers better guidance, help workers understand their role, and give Bangladesh authorities the direction to properly

enforce the law. Tragedies can and should lead to transformation. Workers, including thousands of young women employed for the first time, must be afforded the right to raise their concerns, be respected and work in safe conditions. BGMEA and the government have a responsibility to ensure all factories allow inspectors access and that factories remediate the problems that are identified. These reforms will also increase productivity. The garment sector's plan to grow to \$50 billion by 2021 is crucial to the nation's development goals, given the enormous contribution the RMG sector makes to Bangladesh's economy and women's empowerment. The United States is partnering with the government, the workers, and the employers to show the world that Bangladesh is working toward new standards for workers' rights and safety, ensuring that no worker need fear such a tragedy again.

The writer is U.S. Ambassador to Bangladesh.



No ahsan at the manzil

PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

CHINTITO SINCE 1995



NIZAMUDDIN AHMED

JUST as we do not like to have shik kabab with Chinese noodles (hopefully I am right), or expect someone to wear a red tie over his white Panjabi (undeniably eye-catching), or go swimming voluntarily in a lounge suit (pushing not included), there is no degree of sanity from even the intellectual level of a six-year old (make it sixteen) in erecting grotesque elevator shaft that has completely ruined the aesthetics of Dhaka's Ahsan Manzil at Kumartuli, a heritage building of 1872 protected by law, but unprotected by the very guardians of the edifice. The two-storied stately palace and kachari of the then Dhaka's Nawab family, dubbed the Pink Palace at one time, is a public museum for almost a quarter of a century.

The building's era and history, pomp and grandeur was recognised by the Nagar Unnayan (city development) Committee, which on February 12 2009, under Section 61 of the Dhaka Metropolis Building Construction Rules, 2008, recorded Ahsan Manzil at serial # 52 among 93 buildings of historical, aesthetic, scientific, social, and/or religious importance which must be protected/ preserved/ conserved.

No thanks to the building's custodian, the Bangladesh National Museum authority for defending their unsightly lofty act (against the above order) as 'a service to the disabled'. If the rakkhak have tried to fulfill one government order (i.e. ensuring universal accessibility), surely they have turned vakkhak in appending a lift in the ugliest possible way. Perhaps we will all agree, given their aristocratic taste of the bygone times, that the nawabs of the early part of the last century would consider it blasphemous to witness today the unannounced hobnobbing of a concrete obelisk with this building of eclectic excellence, replete with memories of their ayeshi lifestyle.

The archaeology department deserves no kudos either for trying to shelve responsibility by stating that 'the (national) museum authorities were in charge since the renovation of the edifice in (September) 1992'. But, Sir, it is the duty of the archaeology department to stop any person/s, including any from within its ranks, who attempts to 'alter' or 'deface' an antiquity that is 133 years old, by which measure Ahsan Manzil should be listed under the Antiquities Act, 1968. Section 19 of the 1968 Act spells out: "...no person shall, except for carrying out the purposes of this Act, destroy, break, damage, alter, injure, deface or mutilate, or scribble, write or engrave any inscription or sign on any antiquity in respect of which the Director has accepted guardianship or the Government has acquired any right." But, the building has been, to use cliché, raped in broad daylight.

By law, every building must be provided with ease of access for all. Section 64 of the Dhaka Metropolis Building Construction Rules, 2008 states: "...accessibility for the disabled and all others must essentially be

ensured." That being understood and to abide by the law of protecting antiquity, i.e. without disfiguring the building, all that the museum authority had to do was in keeping with the 2008 Rules (a) contract an Architect, (b) help that Architect find a suitable place inside the building for locating the lift, such that the mechanical contraption would not be so loudly and conspicuously visible from the outside, (c) engage qualified Mechanical and Electrical engineers to prepare the relevant drawings, and (d) in consultation with the consultants try to study if using glass surfaces around the lift, if absolutely essential to locate it outside the building, would have made the visual atrocity less unsightly, obnoxious and revolting.

We are assuming that the National Museum authority did not take the necessary Building Permit from RAJUK, which certification as per the 2008 Rules, is required for any alteration, extension, or addition to any building. The authority should have ensured that all construction drawings are approved.

For the safety of the almost century-and-a-half building that bears the legacy of the ruling class, the structural design of the loathsome shaft should have been prepared by an engineer. This requirement perhaps has been violated because any structural engineer worth his salt would demand an architectural drawing. The drawings for mechanical and electrical services are also required to be prepared by relevant professionals as listed in Clause 41 of the 2008 Rules. Is there an architect, or are there engineers? Was the construction of the shaft supervised?

Ahsan Manzil is an architectural masterpiece of its times and is the silent witness to many historical events. "From the last part of the 19th century to the initial years of Pakistan, the Muslim leadership of East Bengal emerged from this palace. The nawabs of Dhaka used to conduct their court affairs here as chief of the panchayat (village council) everyday. Many anti-Congress meetings were held here under the patronization of Nawab Ahsanullah, a staunch believer in Muslim identity. Almost all the Viceroy, Governors and Lieutenant Governors of British India who visited Dhaka spent some time at the Ahsan Manzil."

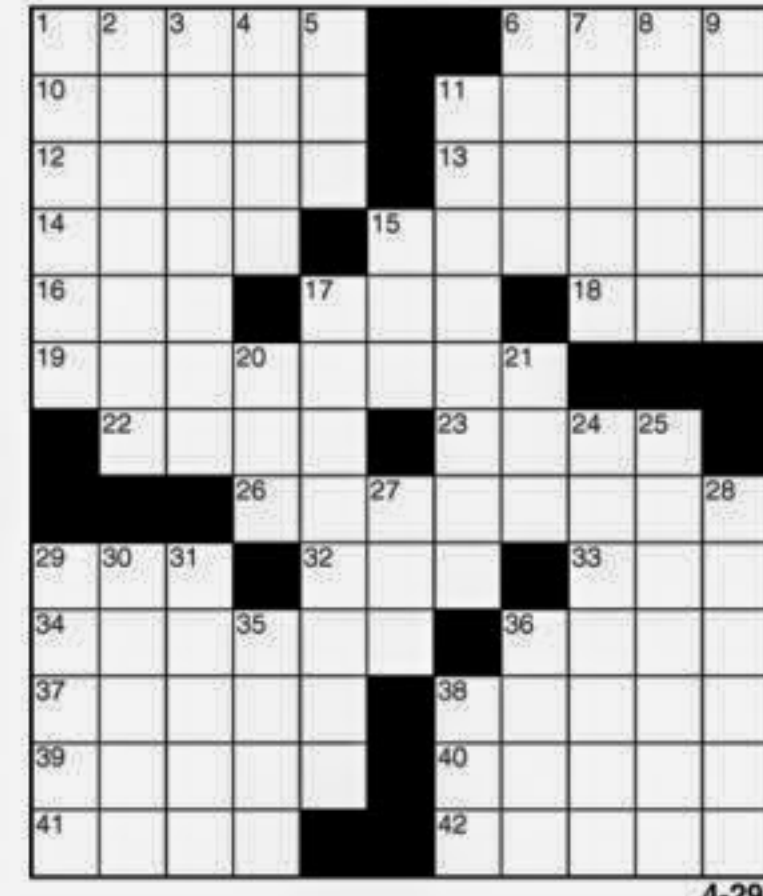
Bangabandhu also recognised the importance of the building, being himself aware of the political history of the period, and it is said that he not only cancelled a proposal for its auction, "but on 2 November 1974, he ordered to establish a museum and tourist centre after its proper conservation." Now such a significant part of our history stands defaced on the bank of the River Buriganga.

Relevant authorities, including the Nagar Unnayan Committee, should adopt urgent measures to remove the horrid shaft that violates the sanctity of the building's riverside façade, and find appropriate means to address the need of the disabled. To pre-empt such disasters, the government should consider appointing officers with adequate pertinent knowledge in such sensitive places. Just anybody cannot protect a protected monument.

The writer is a practising Architect at BashaBari Ltd., a Commonwealth Scholar and a Fellow, a Baden-Powell Fellow Scout Leader, and a Multiple Paul Harris Fellow-cum-Benefactor Rotarian.

CROSSWORD by Thomas Joseph

- ACROSS**
- Unable to eat another bite
 - Cordage fiber
 - Large-scale dismissal
 - Sun-powered
 - Mexican farewell
 - Golf feat
 - Chicago team
 - Dojo activity
 - Subside
 - Make a sharp turn
 - Sprinted
 - Furled
 - Close
 - Tale teller
 - Dressed fancily
 - Recipe amount
 - Possesses
 - Genetic stuff
 - Place for a bump
 - Jail division
 - French farewell
 - Sir's counterpart
 - Moon-based
 - Ham it up
 - Canary snack
- DOWN**
- Printer need
 - Keyboard bar
 - "Birds of America" creator
 - Furry critter from "Star Trek"
 - Big heads
 - Moines
 - Frost
 - "Enigma Variations" composer
 - Island south of Sicily
 - Use the mirror
 - Coast birds
 - Youngster
 - Operation-starting time
 - Young fellow
 - Diner treat
 - Appended
 - Be behind schedule
 - Be behind
 - Golfer Arnold
 - Glowing embers
 - Not called for
 - Colonist Tom
 - Heavy metal
 - Hunting garb, for short
 - Ran into



Yesterday's answer

PLEAT LIMBS
LEASH ELIOT
IN THE CELLAR
ETE SADITA
DONKEYS TIN
NUS BIND
ERIES BRAGS
LONE FEE
AXE SLOW JAM
TAR TOW EMO
IN THE GUTTER
ONION LIENS
NEATO FERDE

CRYPTOQUOTE 3-18
J LYGM MVYGM MIEM MIQ PJMMPQ RJM FA PFUQ
MIEM J GFN HFN NJPP RQEV LEHS AVYJMG, IQVQ JH
MIJG NFPVTEHT MIQ PJAQ MFBFLQ.
- IQHVJ HFYNQH

Yesterday's Cryptoquote: It Is Only In Adventure That Some People Succeed In Knowing Themselves - In Finding Themselves. - ANDRE GIDE

A XYDLBAAXR is LONGFELLOW
One letter stands for another. In this sample, A is used for the three L's, X for the two O's, etc. Single letters, apostrophes, the length and formation of the words are all hints. Each day the code letters are different.

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