

## Rana Plaza tragedy

*Trial process admits of no further delay*

THE Rana Plaza disaster survivors and the relatives of the unfortunate victims have received some compensation and we are glad to note the various measures taken for workers' safety and welfare. But those notwithstanding, the families of the victims and the survivors are still calling out for justice. The trials of the several cases related to the matter are yet to start even after three years of what can only be described as deliberate murder. Incomplete investigation and refusal of the labour ministry to permit its officers to be charged has added to the delay.

The Rana Plaza disaster is an open and shut case; the disaster was waiting to happen. Every possible manner of flouting of rules was resorted to by some government officials to help the owner and the main accused not only to acquire the land but also to construct the building. And the workers were coerced to join work on the day of the disaster in spite of the fact that there were noticeable cracks in the building.

We fail to understand the rationale of the labour ministry for not allowing the names of its officials to be included in the charge sheet when their complicity in the case is evident. We are happy to see one court admit the charge sheet using its inherent jurisdiction and another court order the reinvestigation since the charge sheet did not include names of those who had approved the building design.

Three years is too long for a trial to commence. There is very strong rationale in the suggestions that it might serve the cause of justice better if the trials were held under a special court.

## Railway lands in the hands of grabbers

*Take immediate steps to retrieve them*

BANGLADESH Railway (BR) is heavily subsidised as it is, and to make it even worse for its wobbling revenue generation process, the rail's huge swathes of land, measuring more than 4,000 acres, have been grabbed by individuals, government and private organisations. The railway land under the illegal occupation of government and other state-owned organisations is a whopping 922.34 acres. The Railway Minister has recently told the parliament that in the last 10 months only 132 acres of such land has been retrieved.

It is indeed shocking that railway land has been allowed to be commandeered while it is bled dry of a part of its earning. The rule stipulates that a government entity has to apply to the BR authorities, which allows the transfer of property only after receiving a recommendation from the railway office stating that the land would not be used by it in the future. This procedure, as we can see, has often been flouted, and a coterie of BR officials, in connivance with the land grabbers, has been behind the mismanagement and the loss of railway land. Also, the local administration sometimes, reportedly, lease out BR land without prior approval of the latter.

The crux of the problem lies in corruption and lack of proper supervision. The rail authority should take immediate steps to retrieve its lands that have been grabbed or encroached upon. The list of such properties and the names of offending individuals and institutions should be made public. Also, a probe into the irregularities that have led to the loss of its properties is in order.

## COMMENTS

**"12 lives lost on highway"**  
(April 21, 2016)

Zeba Nasrin

This is unacceptable. We want exemplary punishment of the culprits.

Laila

The passengers of the bus asked the reckless helper to drive carefully but he didn't care. Because he knew nothing was going to happen to him.

MEER AHSAN HABIB

IMAGINE a world where you earn a decent living, the state treats you with fairness, there is little carbon emission in the environment, and on top of everything else, the society values your opinion. Who wouldn't want to live in such a utopian world?

There is hardly any country in the world that takes into consideration all these indicators to determine whether the country and its people are happy. On the contrary, governments consider how fast the country is growing compared to the rest of the world. Bangladesh has achieved a GDP growth of 7.05 percent in the first quarter of 2016. This is an amazing achievement and we are expected to grow at an even faster rate in the coming days. The inclusion of Bangladesh in its Next 11 (N-11) list by Goldman Sachs supplements this expectation. These statistics sound very strong and gives the world a message about the emergence of a new economy - Bangladesh.

But when I ask myself how happy I am, I land in a dilemma - I am happy to earn a decent living, but pessimistic about other issues. Am I too unhappy? When I first met my former UNDP colleague Seeta Giri in 2010, she greeted me with a big smile. Later, I found her to be calmly dealing with tense and critical issues. One day I asked her about her secret to this serenity and she introduced me to Bhutan's unique concept of Gross National Happiness (GNH), established by King Jigme Singye Wangchuck in 1972. The country estimates its GNH based on sustainable development, preservation and promotion of cultural values, conservation of the natural environment and establishment of good governance. For more than three decades, this tiny nation has been nurturing GNH by preferring wellbeing over material growth, thereby attracting a lot of global interest in the face of decaying financial systems, disturbing inequity and wide-scale destruction of the environment. So far we have not been able to do justice to any of the pillars of happiness, which is rightly reflected in the World Happiness Report 2016 (WHR). Bangladesh secured the 110th position in this survey, with a score of 4.643 on a scale of 0-10, while Bhutan ranked the top (84) in South Asia, followed by Pakistan (92) and Nepal (107). Sri Lanka (117), India (118) and Afghanistan (154) fall behind us in this list.

Interestingly, there is a strong co-

relation between sustainable development, governance and happiness. Eight out of the top ten developed countries, including Denmark, Switzerland, Norway, Finland, Canada, the Netherlands, New Zealand and Sweden ranked top positions in both the Corruption Perception Index (CPI) 2015 and the WHR 2016. This further indicates that countries with a high level of governance, less corruption and sustainable development are happier than countries that are found lacking in these areas. Our GDP 'speedometer' indicates that we are running fast. But the question remains whether we are running in the right direction.

countries adopt a more balanced approach, thereby leading to higher levels of well-being for the present and future generations, with a goal to end poverty, protect the planet, and ensure prosperity for all. The WHR 2016 states: "In particular the SDG Index helps to account for cross-national patterns of happiness even after controlling for GDP per capita and unemployment. A measure of Economic Freedom, as proposed by libertarians shows no such explanatory weight. The evidence suggests that indeed all three dimensions of sustainable development— economic, social, and environmental— are needed to account for the cross-country variation in

projects inspired by GNH - South Korea and the city of Seattle (Washington, USA) launched their respective happiness index, while the government of Goa (India) initiated a strategy for socioeconomic development. All of them cited the GNH Index as a model for measuring happiness. In 2014, the government of Dubai launched a localised happiness index to measure the level of satisfaction of public services.

Should Bangladesh try something similar, in parallel with the existing economic indicators? It may not be the best idea to replace GDP or CNI with a happiness index, but Bangladesh should strive to find some answers - how happy



Bangladesh should carefully determine whether its development efforts are sustainable and devised in a holistic, integrated approach to well-being. If we pursue individual objectives, such as economic development, and neglect the social and environmental objectives, we might face dire consequences in the future. Many countries in recent years have achieved economic growth at the cost of social exclusion, rising inequality and grave damage to the environment. China, which is presently facing an economic crisis, is perhaps the best example of this. In this backdrop, the UN has designed the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to help

happiness."

Since its inception by Bhutan, GNH has been gaining momentum every year. In 2010, the United Kingdom introduced the Measuring National Wellbeing Programme in an attempt to measure the level of satisfaction of British citizens at an individual, community and national level. In July 2011, the UN General Assembly unanimously adopted Resolution 65/309 that placed "happiness" on the global development agenda for the first time. The same year, the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) launched its "Better Life Index" (BLI). 2012 marked several development

are Bangladeshis as individuals, as a community and, above all, as a nation. How sustainable are the development figures for the future? In addition to counting economic indicators, taking into consideration an existence of good governance backed by effective anti-corruption drives, a job market which offers decent work environment for all, equal treatment of individuals and conservation of nature could take the country to a whole new level of development and happiness.

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## Three years after Rana Plaza Victim's fate still in debris

SARIF NEER

RAFIQ Khan was working in the 'Ether Tex' garments factory located on the 6th floor of Rana Plaza when it collapsed. As the electricity went out, and as soon as the generator started, everything went black. When Rafiq opened his eyes, he found himself in the rubble. After 19 long hours, he was rescued.

His right leg was broken so badly that he is still in pain. The incident not only injured him physically but also mentally. He was so traumatised that he could not sleep at night. The memory of Rana Plaza would haunt him constantly and stop him from doing his regular work. He was scared of sounds that triggered memories of the collapse.

When the Rana Plaza disaster took place, I was working as a journalist for a television channel. I covered the deadly disaster from the very first day. It was a horrible experience, indeed, to see so many dead bodies, scarred faces, wounded body parts and the crying faces of the survivors under the collapsed roof. As a journalist, I had the advantage of going inside to see the real picture. I can recall that I could not eat during the day, nor sleep at night. Even after the rescue operations came to an end, I could not sleep for three/four months. When the deadly disaster comes to my mind, still, I see corpses, blood, families crying, survivors wailing... I can barely contain my emotions.

I underwent psychological treatment

from a trained therapist. Despite having all the privileges of a middle-class background, the trauma of the incident still haunts me.

Even after three years of the incident, this is my situation. Can we even imagine what kind of problems a survivor like Rafiq has been facing?

Just a few days ago, I had a conversation with Rafiq. He said, "I still can't work properly. After Rana Plaza, I received payment for my treatment from many organisations. But these couldn't make me better. Now, I have to pay for my treatment. I can't sleep at night. I can't even think about going to the garment factory again."

Rafiq talked about how helpless he feels. He said, "After Rana Plaza, many people and institutions communicated with me. They gave me money in different phases, but I could not use it for generating income. Now, no one communicates with me." After the collapse, Rafiq received training on entrepreneurship, and with his saving and financial support from organisations, he established a business. But his mental and physical condition was such that he couldn't manage to run the business properly.

Rafiq is one example of the 2,500 survivors of Rana Plaza. According to a survey report of ActionAid Bangladesh titled 'Three Years Post Rana Plaza: Challenges in RMG Sector' published on 16 July, 2016, a majority of the survivors' situation is the same as Rafiq's: 58.4 percent survivors of the collapse are still traumatised and 48 percent of them

remain unemployed due to physical and mental weakness even after three years of the tragedy. The report highlights our ignorance and irresponsible attitude towards the survivors and the family of the deceased.

This is the third consecutive survey of ActionAid Bangladesh. In 2016, the survey was conducted on over 1,300 survivors and 500 relatives of the deceased. The report provides us with some good news as well, such as that the physical condition of 78.8 percent of the 1,414 injured workers is improving. Meanwhile, 14.6 percent of the injured workers say they still have serious physical problems. Is it an acceptable outcome after three years?

I have been working on the Rana Plaza issue since the incident took place. I have talked with some physiotherapists and physiologists who are currently working with some of the survivors. According to them, survivors need continuous physiological and psychological support for 2-4 years. Without this support, survivors will not be able to deal with the trauma and it will continue to haunt them for the rest of their lives.

But the reality is, survivors do not have the luxury of taking care of and improving their mental and physical condition. On average, a survivor spends 61.1 percent on food, 15.5 percent on house rent, 12.4 percent on children's education and only 8.4 percent for treatment.

Survivors of Rana Plaza are finding it difficult to get jobs; they are still suffering

from trauma; support from the responsible stakeholders seems to be on the decline. How then can a survivor dream of a better life? Who should take responsibility for their wellbeing?

Survivors have received financial support in different phases. However, while one might have received around Tk. 2 to 5 lakhs in compensation, someone else, with the same difficulties, got a lesser amount. There is still confusion regarding the actual compensation and its proper disbursement. The plan of disbursing compensation should include the long term economic, physical and psychological support of the survivors and the families of those who perished in this terrible disaster. Unfortunately, however, most of the survivors have only received temporary financial support without any long-term need assessment.

The initiatives taken by responsible stakeholders are usually separate or on an ad-hoc basis. And so we need to ensure that the initiatives are institutionalised. If we can formulate a legal framework, addressing issues like compensation, safety, security and compliance, stakeholders are bound to fulfil their responsibilities accordingly. We don't want any more Rafiqs to struggle through their life. We want survivors and the families of the deceased to live a normal life, a life that is not bereft of the financial, psychological or social security that they deserve.

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## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Letters @ thedailystar.net

### Protect Mustafiz

Mustafiz is a rare breed of cricketer who has already made his mark at the world stage. During the World Cup T20, many commentators have spoken about the danger of his over exposure at this young age as he was supposed to play at IPL and then in English County League.

One may recall that Cricket Australia protected Shane Warne at the beginning of his career by not giving him permission to play in the English County League and they gave him some sort of financial benefit to compensate his monetary loss (Warne played county

cricket much later in his career). As a result, Shane Warne could prolong his career and become a world class bowler.

Our cricket board can act wisely by letting Mustafiz play in the IPL only for the time being and provide him with some monetary incentive to compensate him for not playing in other overseas tournaments. This way we can protect Mustafizur Rahman. Excessive playing at such young age would only harm him physically. BCB should act sooner in this respect; this would do the nation a great service.



Murshid Alam  
Uttara, Dhaka

### Quit smoking

I used to be a chain smoker. But I gave it up through sheer will power. Now I am healthier and I feel better. It makes me sad to see that many young boys and girls have picked up this harmful habit. I would like to urge all smokers to quit smoking as it does no good; it just costs us money and damages our health.  
Parvez Babul  
Dhaka, Bangladesh

### Colleges or exam centres?

It seems that the classrooms are not meant for dissemination of knowledge anymore. Classroom activities in many government colleges take a back seat as the colleges are busy holding various public and other exams. The authorities should do something to address the problem.  
Zabed Wali  
Chittagong