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RANA PLAZA SPECIAL

Factbox | Major industrial accidents in Bangladesh in recent years

- 2005**
January | 22 killed and 50+ injured in a fire at Shan Knitting & Processing in Naryanganj
April | At least 64 killed and 100 injured in Spectrum-Shahriyar garment factory building collapse in Dhaka
- 2006**
February | 21 workers killed and dozens injured in Phoenix garment factory building collapse in Dhaka
65 workers killed and dozens injured in a fire at KTS Composite Textile Mill in Chittagong
- 2010**
February | 21 workers killed and 50 injured in a fire at Garib & Garib garment factory in Dhaka
December | At least 26 killed and 100 injured in a fire at Ha-Meem Group's sportswear factory in Dhaka
- 2012**
November | 112 killed and 150+ injured in a fire at Dhaka's Tazreen Fashions that supplied global brands. Believed to be started by a short circuit, it was the deadliest factory fire in Bangladesh's history.
- 2013**
April | At least 1,126 killed and hundreds injured when Rana Plaza building housing five garment factories supplying global brands collapsed outside Dhaka. It was the worst industrial disaster in Bangladesh and the world's deadliest since the 1984 Bhopal disaster in India.
- 2015**
January | 13 killed and dozens injured in a fire at a plastics factory in the APCCO Complex building in Dhaka
- 2016**
August | Around 250 people fell ill from a toxic gas leak at DAP Fertiliser Company factory in Chittagong
September | At least 39 killed and dozens injured in fire at Tampaco Foils packaging factory in Dhaka

INFOGRAPHIC: AMIYA HALDER

RANA PLAZA SPECIAL



WHAT AFTER RANA PLAZA?

HAMEEDA HOSSAIN

Four years ago, over a thousand workers lost their lives and 2500 were injured in the collapse of the Rana Plaza building. We showed a strong resolve to rescue the injured trapped under the debris of bricks and steel. Ordinary men and women worked alongside Fire Service Volunteers and military, and ambulances whistled past Ashulia to the nearest hospital. We responded to the emergency... But since then have workers been compensated, and are they safe at work?

The nine story building collapsed because it was constructed on swampy land fill, and two floors had been added when permission was granted for seven floors only. This sparked demands for greater safety and accountability from both suppliers and buyers of ready-made clothing from Bangladesh. We expected that the industrial damage would lead to a structured response from the fast growing export industry for compensation to affected workers. We hoped Rana Plaza would be a turning point for workers' safety.

Four years on, workers still await justice. The lower courts took note of the violations in obtaining permission for the building and arrested the owner, Sohel Rana. But four years on, trials have not been concluded, although bank accounts of five factories located in the building were frozen to prevent misappropriation.

However, an exception allowed for payment of workers' wages. Workers' claims for compensation are yet to be resolved. Merely weeks after the incident, under instructions from the courts, a Compensation Committee was set up to calculate an appropriate range of compensation based upon ILO Convention 121, taking into consideration suffering and pain or workers' disability to work and so on. The Committee's recommendations were to compensate for losses due to industrial deaths, grievous injuries, etc. Four years later, the Court has yet to settle the terms of compensation for Rana Plaza workers which could set the standard for compensation to workers for further industrial disasters. Instead, the Rana Plaza Arrangement, set up under the sponsorship of the International Labour Organisation (ILO)

and including representatives from government, RMG industry, international trade unions and global brands, initiated a claims process which was able to assess over 4000 claims from families of deceased, missing and injured survivors. While these voluntary payments may have helped workers and their families survive over the last few years, they are no substitute for a fair and just compensation. This is why trade unions and human rights organisations have petitioned the High Court for legal compensation, and for raising the paltry amount retained in the Bangladesh Labour Act, 2006 to an amount in conformity with ILO 121.

In an export industry, accountability for safe work has to be a joint responsibility of suppliers and buyers. So far both parties have been neglectful. After Rana Plaza, campaigns by international and local trade unions have led to some acknowledgment of responsibility by global brands. The legally binding Bangladesh Accord on Fire and Building Safety (formed by European buyers) promised to finance a programme for safety inspections, remediation and fire safety training, all of which are urgently needed. The Alliance for Workers' Safety formed by US companies has also agreed to identify safety hazards at each factory that supplies to them.

The Accord partners had agreed to finance factories willing to implement the Corrective Action Plan. However, several factories have complained that they were not compensated for the cost of remediation. There were also complaints from workers that they did not always receive promised wages when their factories were closed.

These gaps need to be corrected in the interests of the industry and its workers. Both the Accord and Alliance were formed in response to a global movement by trade unions and citizens' groups. Collective campaigns in Bangladesh and outside led to promises of corrective action by both the Accord and Alliance agreements. However, a collective activism by trade unions and citizens' groups needs to be sustained to make the industry respond to justice for workers and ensure accountability of the Accord and Alliance.

Bangladesh garment exports are reported to have risen to \$28.09 bn in the fiscal year 2015-16, showing a 10.21 percent growth from the previous year. In addition, the industry has obtained deductions on tariffs and other charges. There are financial gains for buyers and suppliers which need to be invested in workers' safety and health. Or the costs of such industrial accidents will be high for the industry.

Hameeda Hossain is Convenor, Sramik

MAILBOX

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Suffering from an Identity Crisis?

I would like to thank *Star Weekend* for publishing the article titled "Suffering from an identity crisis?" by Fahmida Zaman which indubitably stated that we have an identity crisis. Bangladesh is called a "Muslim country" only because, in this country, the number of Muslims is higher than the devotees of other religions. However, leaders of no other Muslim majority country of the world call their states "Muslim country." This debate on ethno-religious issue has created a chaos in our national, political and even in our cultural participation. It is sometimes believed that Islam has prohibited its followers to celebrate festivals which is derived from or related to other religion. However, whether a person wants to celebrate a particular festival should be left to their own choice in a democratic country like Bangladesh. I do not think celebrating a festival can be the testament to their nationality or religious belief.
Rakibul Islam
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PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

Is this Our City?

When I read the article titled "Is this Our City?" I was really shocked because even I never thought about how a person with disability crosses a busy street or how they walk along the crowded, broken sidewalks. It is very unfortunate that nobody thinks about the challenges faced by the people with disabilities in Bangladesh whereas we are now a middle income nation. Their

sufferings and deprivations are completely absent from our mindset. I think rights of the people with disabilities should be incorporated in the school textbooks so that we can learn to be compassionate and ensure the rights of the people with special needs from our early life. I would like to thank *Star Weekend* for writing about this unheard but significant issue.
Bappy Sadhu
Islamic University, Kushtia

Anandabazar's Alt-Journalism

Media plays a significant role in a democratic society. The published news and articles in the media are the windows through people can see the world outside. Reporters and editors create public opinion through their widely circulated publications. Due to media's huge influence over people's mind, the responsibility of the media-workers is also immense. For any false and distorted news, irreparable disasters can occur, for which, the media organisation has to be held accountable. In this age of click bait online journalism, journalists should be very careful about the sensitivity of their job and their responsibility towards the nation. In this regard, the article titled "Anandabazar's alt-journalism" published in *Star Weekend* on April 7, 2017 was a very important piece of writing. It reveals one of the worst examples of yellow journalism. I was shocked to see how a newspaper can still run its operation after making so much false news and outrageous journalistic blunders. I think the article can also be a lesson for Bangladeshi journalists. They should remember that people will lose faith on their media outlet and abandon them if they continue to publish false and distorted news to hide the truth intentionally.
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