

SETTING OUR PRIORITIES STRAIGHT

SCOTT NOVA

The Rana Plaza collapse wasn't just the worst mass fatality disaster in the history of the garment industry; it was the worst mass fatality disaster in the history of all manufacturing. Through all the centuries that human beings have been making products in commercial buildings, and across all the countries where those goods have been made, there had never been a catastrophe as costly in terms of human life as Rana Plaza.

Yet for all its uniqueness, Rana Plaza was the product of the same dynamics that caused every other mass fatality incident Bangladesh's garment sector in recent years: The abject failure of the government of Bangladesh to fulfill its regulatory responsibility in the building safety arena. The abject failure of Western brands and retailers to step in to fill the regulatory gap the government had left, even as they repeatedly reassured their customers they were taking all necessary steps to protect the rights and safety of workers. The price and delivery pressure those brands and retailers recklessly placed on Bangladeshi factory owners and the willingness of those owners to ignore workplace safety rules in response.

Ruthless price pressure, irresponsible factory management, and lax regulation are a lethal combination.

Most disturbing is how easily Rana Plaza, and the Tazreen Fashions fire before it, could have been prevented. There were so many warnings, including the seven different fires and building collapses in 2005 and 2006 that collectively killed more than 200 workers. Then there was the Garib & Garib fire in February of 2010, with 21 deaths, and the fire at That's It Sportswear in December of that year, which killed 29.



After that fire, unions and international labour rights organisations proposed a binding agreement to finally carry out the programme of safety inspections and renovations necessary to put an end to the parade of horrors. In April of 2011, the so-called

"stakeholders" all convened at the BGMEA to discuss this concept, including the call for brands and retailers to help pay the cost of essential renovations. The brands and retailers, led by Walmart, rejected the concept out of hand.

One major retailer argued it did not need such a programme, because it had made a great educational video and was using it to train workers on fire and building safety. It is too bad that retailer couldn't train workers how to walk through flames or how to dodge collapsing floor slabs.

In end, only two corporations signed a building safety agreement before Tazreen and Rana: PVH, the owner of Calvin Klein and Tommy Hilfiger, and the German retailer Tchibo. Because there were so few signers, that agreement, the precursor to the Bangladesh Accord, could not be implemented.

What if other brands and retailers had joined PVH and Tchibo? What if a massive inspection programme like the Accord, with mandatory safety renovations, had been launched not in the wake of Rana Plaza, but in 2011? Rana and Tazreen would have been inspected, the grave hazards in both buildings exposed. Rana would likely have been forced to close, Tazreen pressured to fix faulty wiring and install fire doors.

Instead, the brands and retailers went on exactly as before. They continued to mislead consumers in Europe and North America, claiming that they were carrying out thorough inspections in all their factories. In reality, none of them ever bothered to hire qualified safety engineers or to include in their audit protocols the safety issues that actually mattered, like fire doors and the strength of structural columns. So Walmart's auditors never noticed that Tazreen had no fire exits. And the auditors for Benetton and Children's Place never checked the structural integrity of the Rana building.

How is it possible that hundreds of leading global corporations, each

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Sandal Wood Extract এর সর্বোচ্চ নিশ্চয়তা...

স্যান্ডালিনা

সোপ

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রূপচর্চায় আন্ডিজাশ্য...

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