

LEST WE FORGET

# What we lost on November 3, 1975

The year 1975 will remain forever a year of treachery, infamy and tragedy. Within a few years of our nation's birth we witnessed the brutal assassination of the Father of the Nation, Bangabandhu on August 15, along with most of his family members and other innocents caught in that conspiracy of cowardice. Barely three months later, the four national leaders Syed Nazrul Islam, Tajuddin Ahmed, Capt. Mansur Ali and AHM Qamaruzzaman, were killed in cold blood inside Dhaka Central Jail. They had been incarcerated by the killers of Bangabandhu and their accomplices. They had to pay with their lives for being loyal to their leader, to the principles of social justice and truth, to the values of the liberation they had so possessively guarded and helped materialise. Today, November 3, known as the Jail Killing Day, we mourn this black chapter of our history and remind ourselves of the remarkable leadership, selflessness and vision of these four leaders who had dedicated themselves to freeing their country from oppression. On this occasion, we remember these heroes with love, respect and gratitude.



(L-R) Tajuddin Ahmad, Syed Nazrul Islam, M Mansur Ali and AHM Qamaruzzaman.

## Syed Nazrul Islam

Syed Nazrul Islam (1925-1975) was the Vice President of Mujibnagar Government in exile during the Bangladesh Liberation War and served as the Acting President of Bangladesh from April 17, 1971 till January 12, 1972, in the absence of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. Under his leadership, the Mujibnagar Government performed all the wartime activities and led the War of Liberation.

Born in 1925 in Kishoreganj, he completed his MA in history in 1947 and LLB in 1953 from Dhaka University. Syed Nazrul Islam's political career began when he joined the Awami Muslim League. He was arrested by Pakistani police in 1952 for his involvement in the Language Movement. He later became a close associate of Bangabandhu and was jailed during Awami League's Six Point Programme.

After the crackdown of March 25, 1971, he along with the senior AL leaders escaped to India and later formed the Mujibnagar

Government. Syed Nazrul Islam played a key role in coordinating the Mukti Bahini and winning support in favour of our independence from India and other nations. After independence, he led the ministry of industry in the first cabinet of Bangabandhu. He was also a member of the committee made for drafting the Constitution of Bangladesh.

## Tajuddin Ahmad

One of the most important figures in the history of Bangladesh, Tajuddin Ahmad was born on July 23, 1925, in what is now Kapasia, Gazipur. Throughout his academic life, he was a meritorious and brilliant student.

When Bangabandhu was in solitary confinement in Pakistan, he spearheaded and oversaw the liberation movement. As the premier of the Mujibnagar Government during the Liberation War, he presided over the Bangladesh Sector Commanders Conference, forming the Bangladesh Armed Forces. After Bangladesh came into being, he was appointed the minister of finance and planning.

While his love, respect and loyalty towards Bangabandhu were beyond doubt, he did not hesitate to speak his mind even if it meant going against the tide. In their final days, Bangabandhu and Tajuddin, political companions for 30 years, might have had differences in opinion, but their fate was tied together. Just after the killers assassinated Bangabandhu on August 15, 1975, Tajuddin was put under house arrest. A week later, he was arrested with about 20 other political figures. Two months later, Tajuddin, along with his three fellow comrades, was murdered inside Dhaka Central Jail.

## M Mansur Ali

Captain M Mansur Ali was the finance minister of the Mujibnagar Government in exile during the Liberation War of 1971. Born in 1919 in Sirajganj, he graduated from Calcutta Islamia College and obtained MA in economics and a law degree from Aligarh Muslim University. After joining Awami Muslim League in 1951, he became very active in politics and was arrested in 1952 in Pabna for

his participation in the Language Movement.

Mansur Ali played an important role in the Six Point Programme. He was elected as member of the Provincial Assembly from Pabna in 1970. As the finance minister in the cabinet of Bangladesh government in exile, he played a key role in the Liberation War. After independence, Mansur Ali became the minister for communication, and then the minister for home affairs and communication in Bangabandhu's cabinet. In 1973, he was elected as member of the National Assembly, and as member in the Awami League Parliamentary Party.

Captain Mansur Ali went into hiding immediately after the killing of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman on August 15, 1975. Although Khondaker Mostaq Ahmad included some of the Awami League leaders in his cabinet, Captain Mansur Ali and three other national leaders refused to join his cabinet. Subsequently, they were arrested on August 23, 1975 and brutally killed on November

3, 1975 in Dhaka Central Jail.

## AHM Qamaruzzaman

Born on June 26, 1926 in Rajshahi, Abul Hasnat Muhammad Qamaruzzaman was one of the protagonists of our liberation campaign.

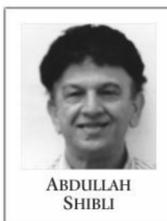
He obtained a degree in economics from the University of Calcutta in 1946, and a law degree from the Rajshahi University in 1956. A lawyer by profession, Qamaruzzaman never lost in any assembly or parliament election after 1962.

In the Mujibnagar provisional government, Qamaruzzaman was given the portfolio of interior, relief and rehabilitation ministries. Accordingly, he faced a daunting task: managing millions of refugees and overseeing the relief and rehabilitation process.

After Bangladesh emerged as an independent country, Qamaruzzaman retained his position as home minister in the cabinet led by Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman.

He was arrested soon after Bangabandhu was assassinated.

# Transparency: What does it mean for the apparel industry?



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A news item that probably did not get much attention in Bangladesh media was an announcement in The Hague that an international court has accepted a case against two well-known fashion brands in March 2018. While the name of the two targeted brands that are sourcing apparel from Bangladesh has been subject to a gag order by the judge, the suit brought forth by the two international signatories to Accord, could have important ramifications in the coming months should this lead to any further ripple effects in the global apparel market. While one or two incidents do not necessarily augur bad news, everyone involved with our RMG industry and commerce ought to ask if the five years since the Rana Plaza incident have brought us any closer to compliance.

The case against these two brands was brought by two global labour union federations, IndustriALL and UNI, in the Permanent Court of Arbitration (PCA) in The Hague. The ruling announced on October 16 by PCA only holds that the claims by the two plaintiffs are admissible and within its jurisdiction. The unions allege that the brands have been very slow in implementing the measures incorporated in the Accord signed by the major retailers in 2013, and identified numerous issues in the supply chain, specifically, "long hours, low pay, poor safety

standards" and anti-union actions against garment workers in Bangladesh.

The two unions along with major fashion brands including H&M, Primark, and Zara were signatories to the current Accord agreement which covers ready-made garment facilities, and expires in June 2018. An extension of Accord will enable it to run until 2021, and the second agreement Accord 2.0 allows for the inclusion of suppliers producing home textiles, yarn, cloth and other related products. After a boiler explosion in July killed ten and injured 50 at a garment factory, talks began to expand the scope of the Accord to include boiler safety.

While the judgments made by the PCA are not legally binding, its verdict or decision represents a major victory for the parties involved. It may be recalled that PCA was involved in the Indo Bangladesh Maritime Border Dispute and more recently in a case brought by The Philippines against China in the South China Sea. The ruling against China proved to be a significant moral boost for the Philippines which found itself sidelined by China's actions in the disputed islands in the South China Sea.

The adverse publicity from any judgment against the two brands doing business with Bangladesh can only be harmful for our apparel industry which has already reported some turbulent weather in our export market in recent months. According to a story entitled "Why Bangladesh apparel exports to US is declining" in *Textile Today*, a trade journal, the factors which appear to be adversely impacting our customer base are: higher duty, longer lead-time,

appreciation of Taka against the dollar, less import by US retailers and inefficient port operations in Bangladesh. It is to be noted, though, that the report does not explain why US retailers chose to import less from Bangladesh while revealing that "shipment to the US, the country's single largest export destination, declined by 7.47 percent year-on-year" in 2016-2017. However, two well-known factors that stand out are

worth exploring what role the recent surge in rumours against Bangladesh's labour practices and safety improvements in sourcing circles has played.

On July 28, 2017, a news item in *The Globe and Mail*, the largest circulating newspaper in Canada brazenly declared in a headline story: "Most Bangladesh factories are still unsafe, and consumers should not feel comfortable". This was jointly written by Professor John

nificantly and he attributed this to the higher cost of reconstruction. "They're complex and time consuming. The lack of clarity over who's going to pay or how payment will take place has been a major source of delay," he mentioned in an interview. Incidentally, Professor John Richards is well known to *The Daily Star* readers. He is the author of the piece, "Our children are in school, but can they read?" published on September 20, 2017 in *The Daily Star*.

It appears that given some questions about the state of the factories in Bangladesh, it cannot hurt for the BGMEA, with a little nudge from the government, to embrace transparency as a national goal and publish some self-assessment findings or explore sustainability reporting. There are many in the market, including "Higg Index" by Sustainable Apparel Coalition (SAC), Sustainability Reporting Framework by GRI, and Business Environment Performance Initiative (BEPI) by Foreign Trade Association (FTA).

To highlight these issues and to generate interest among the stakeholders, Harvard University will host the forthcoming 4th International Conference on "Sustainable Apparel Sourcing-Multi-Stakeholder Collaboration beyond Compliance and Transparency", in December, 2017. The day-long event is being organised by the International Sustainable Development Institute (ISDI) in collaboration with South Asian researchers and academics based in Boston.

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reduced capacity in the RMG industry necessitated by remediation measures and what might be called "shifts in demand".

As is well-known, price and quantity in a competitive market, for garments as an example, are determined by both supply and demand. In the case of Bangladesh, it appears that both shifts in supply (factory closure) and demand (emergence of sources in Cambodia and Ethiopia) are responsible. But, it is

Richards of Simon Fraser University's School of Public Policy and Kirk Hepburn, a graduate of School of Public Policy. The research paper they co-authored identified several problems based on their review of inspection reports and person-to-person interviews. While most electrical and fire issues have been remedied according to their report, Kirk Hepburn voiced his concerns regarding structural issues which he views as lagging behind sig-