

# STAR WEEKEND

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## EDITOR'S NOTE

We, as a people, are fond of referring to our glorious and revolutionary history; and yet, a crucial part of that revolutionary history, that of our labour movement(s), remains neglected, at least in mainstream discourses. This special May Day issue is an attempt, albeit a modest one, to highlight some of these omissions.

The issue is divided into two parts: the first part explores the long tradition of organising in East Bengal (and what is now Bangladesh), through the experiences of veteran leftist leaders who played an instrumental role in shaping the labour movement as well the anti-colonial and national movements in the region. The second part attempts to highlight how the hopes of a radical reordering of society fell through the cracks in independent Bangladesh, with labour rights taking a backseat in the face of wholesale privatisation of state-owned industries, trade liberalisation and export-oriented development during successive regimes. The trade union movement, once the mainstay of the left, also weakened, not least due to attempts, by both state and non-state actors, to create a docile workforce, who must do, but never question.

The dream of a socialist state, in which workers are given their due, becomes even more distant, with each passing decade. We look back at the past, and evaluate the present, with the hopes that we may dream again of a better, more egalitarian future.

**Sushmita S Preetha**  
Editor  
Star Weekend

# A TIMELINE OF LABOUR HISTORY IN BANGLADESH

Infographic: Shaer Reaz || Research: Shamsudozza Sajen

The labour movement(s) of Bangladesh is long and little known. The events selected here highlight some of the important moments in the development of our working class. Beginning from the early industrial age of Bengal to today's world of neoliberal capitalism, we document incidences of oppression and resistance in an effort to show the changing relationships between man, machine and capital.

## 1881



Indian Factories Act is passed. Under this Act, the hours of employment for women are limited to eleven hours per day; the minimum age of children at work is raised from seven to nine years and they can be made to work for seven hours at day time. A weekly holiday is also provided in the Act.

## 1905

Development of local industries in Bengal receives a great impetus owing to the Swadeshi movement in protest of Partition of Bengal. Swadeshi workers urge people not to wear any cloth made in Lancashire or Manchester Cotton Mills. The Printers' Union organised in Calcutta in 1905. A number of strikes occur in mills and railways, especially Eastern Bengal State Railways. Some leaders take up the cause of industrial workers to accentuate political agitation.

## 1908

With the Swadeshi spirit, Mohini Cotton Mill is established in Kushtia, East Bengal.



## 1911

Indian Factories Act is amended. The new Act fixes a twelve-hour day for men and eleven for women, with an interval of half an hour per day for meals. The minimum age of working children is raised from nine to twelve, and the term "children" apply to all those under fifteen instead of fourteen as hitherto. A six-hour working day for children is also fixed in the Act.

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