

BANGLADESH
UPDATE



4,014
New cases in 24hrs



7,36,078
Total cases



10,781
Deaths



6,42,449
Recoveries

GLOBAL
UPDATE



3,077,605
Deaths



144,930,870
Total cases

FIRE AND BUILDING SAFETY IN RMG SECTOR

Brands yet to agree to renew accord

It expires May 31

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Although the Accord on Fire and Building Safety in Bangladesh is set to expire on May 31, no brand has yet agreed to re-sign the agreement.

Speakers from Clean Clothes Campaign (CCC), IndustriALL and Worker Rights Consortium stated this at a press briefing, titled ‘Protect Progress: The Bangladesh Accord and Garment Worker Safety Under Threat’, organised virtually yesterday, slamming the brands for not renewing the accord.

The current agreement -- which has legally prohibited brands from sourcing from unsafe RMG factories -- will expire in five weeks, notified the speakers. Following the expiration, unless brands extend their commitment, there will be no such legally-binding agreement, they said.

“Instead, brands are proposing watered-down versions of the programme that carry a very real risk that workplace safety in Bangladesh would backslide to the pre-Rana Plaza levels,” said Clean Clothes Campaign.

The Accord was signed weeks after the collapse of Rana Plaza in 2013 as a binding safety programme, and over 200 brands gave their commitments to the agreement.

As per CCC, the body worked with 1,600 factories to make them structurally safe and compliant with international standards, and the signatory brands and retailers could only source from those factories. Suppliers also had to participate in the inspection and remediation programmes and ensure that remediation at their suppliers was financially feasible, it said.

On June 1, 2020, the RMG Sustainability Council (RSC) took over the Accord in Bangladesh. The RSC will continue with factory inspections, remediation monitoring, and workplace programmes.

“The RSC is a tripartite organisation in Bangladesh, but it does not have the same legal accountability or the same mechanisms to hold brands accountable. We need to have a global agreement between the brands and the unions,” said Christina Hajagos-Clausen, garment director at IndustriALL Global Union.

“The Accord which has been extremely successful is currently threatened by the brand’s refusal to sign the agreement,” said Alke Boessiger, head of commerce department, UNI Global Union.

Speakers said that a year of being hard-hit by the pandemic was contributing to the refusal of the brands to continue with the Accord.

But there is no alternative to legislation, if companies are to be held accountable. “Or you need to have legally binding agreements. Voluntary commitments have always failed,” said Christina.

“Negotiations are happening late because the brands requested so because of the pandemic and the unions agreed to it. We have been contacting brands to know about their position on key features. So far only ASOS has given a positive response,” said Ineke Zeldenrust, international coordinator at Clean Clothes Campaign.

“The brands need to sign the agreement with the Global Union and make sure that the workers’ safety is ensured. Nobody will listen to the Readymade Sustainability Council [RSC]. We are asking all the brands to sign the old agreement,” said Kalpona Akter, president of the Bangladesh Garment and Industrial Workers Federation and founder of the Bangladesh Centre for Worker Solidarity.

“The call is not just for the current signatories, but also for all other brands, including those who were signatories of Alliance,” said Christina.

“The Accord has saved lives. We have only had about 10-12 lives lost and that too to things like boiler explosions. Boiler safety was included much later into the Accord,” she added.

There’s still over 900 factories that do not have a guaranteed safe exit route,” said Ineke.

“There are five weeks to go until the Accord agreement runs out, but the first Accord came about in only three. Brands can make it happen if they want to,” said Kalpona.

Nasir Mansoor, president of the National Trade Union Federation in Pakistan, also spoke at the event.

Earth Day summit

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Suga, who discussed climate last week when he was Biden’s first foreign guest, significantly raised the goals of the world’s second largest developed economy to cutting emissions by 46 percent in 2030 compared with 2013.

Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, another early ally of Biden, boosted ambitions of his energy-exporting country to reductions of 40-45 percent below 2005 levels, compared with an earlier target of 30 percent.

“We must take action now. Because there’s no vaccine against a polluted planet,” Trudeau said.

The European Union this week confirmed its own ambitious goals and former bloc member Britain on the eve of Biden’s summit released the most far-reaching targets of any major economy with 78 percent cuts from 1990 levels by 2035.

British Prime Minister Boris Johnson called Biden’s pledge “a game-changer” that will “have a transformative impact in the global fight against climate change.”

Britain in November will host a UN conference in Glasgow that aims to upgrade the Paris Agreement, which aims to limit global warming to 2.0 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels.

A Biden administration official said with the new US target, enhanced commitments from Japan and Canada, and prior targets from the European Union and Britain, countries accounting for more than half the world’s economy were now committed to reductions to achieve the 1.5 degrees Celsius goal.

UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres hailed the pledges made at the summit as a turning point but urged immediate action.

“Today’s summit shows the tide is turning for climate action, but there is still a long way to go,” Guterres said in a statement.

Under the 2015 Paris accord, former president Barack Obama said the United States would cut emissions by 26 to 28 percent by 2025 -- a goal that Biden, his vice president, has now dramatically scaled up.

In a brief glitch, Secretary of State Antony Blinken cut off a pre-recorded video from French President Emmanuel Macron to hear from Russian President Vladimir Putin, who appeared to be impatient to make his live remarks.

Both Putin and Chinese President Xi Jinping spoke of commitments to climate change, agreeing to participate

despite high tensions with Biden’s three-month-old administration.

Xi reiterated his pledge that China -- by far the world’s largest emitter -- would reach carbon neutral by 2060.

“China has committed to move from carbon peak to carbon neutrality in a much shorter time span than what might take many developed countries, and that requires extraordinarily hard efforts from China,” Xi said.

He said China would “strictly control” coal-powered plants.

But environmentalists have voiced alarm at the lack of immediate action to curb coal, which is the dirtiest form of energy but politically sensitive due to mining jobs.

Faced with opposition from Trump’s Republican Party, Biden has sought to move quickly on climate and has cast his efforts as a way to create well-paying jobs.

Biden has proposed a \$2 trillion infrastructure package that includes a major focus on greening the economy, including investment in renewable energy, electric cars and public transportation.

Biden also announced that the United States would double its climate aid to poor nations compared with Obama’s time -- another reversal from Trump, who cut off all such funding.

South Korean President Moon Jae-in announced that his nation would no longer fund coal-powered plants overseas after backing, along with Japan and China, billions of dollars in such dirty projects in Asia.

Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro, one of Trump’s few international allies on climate, sounded a conciliatory note as he promised his nation would reach carbon neutrality by 2050 -- 10 years earlier than previously announced. He also promised to stop illegal deforestation by 2030.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi of India -- which is the third largest emitter, but far lower than the West on a per capita basis -- made no new pledges but promised a new “partnership” with Biden to mobilize green investment and urged a greater “lifestyle change” to fight climate change.

A UN report late last year said that the world was on course for warming of three degrees Celsius -- a level at which the planet is forecast to see many glaciers and ice caps melt, low-lying areas submerged and increasingly severe droughts, floods and disasters that could trigger famine and mass migration.



Bagful of vegetables being distributed for free among locals in TSC area of Dhaka University yesterday amid the ongoing restrictions imposed to curb the spread of the coronavirus. The initiative was taken by the Dhaka South City Corporation authorities.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

First jab to go on despite shortage

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He said the government should restart giving people their first shots once it has enough vaccines.

The government said it was trying to get vaccines early next month to ensure a smooth vaccination campaign.

“The ongoing vaccination will be continued. Both the first and second doses will go on simultaneously. Now, our concern is to bring vaccine from any of the sources before the stock exhausts,” Health Minister Zahid Maleque told The Daily Star yesterday.

He also said they were in close contact with other sources to avail Chinese and Russian vaccines.

“We are even in talks to get the Oxford vaccine from other sources,” said the health minister, without providing details.

“We have given permission to Sinopharm [from China] and received five lakh doses,” he said, adding that the government was ready to receive any amount of vaccine Sinopharm could offer.

The minister also said the same message was sent regarding the Russian Sputnik V vaccine. “We are getting positive responses from the alternative sources. We are hopeful that we will get vaccines before the stock exhausts.”

Foreign Minister AK Abdul Momen told journalists that Russia has recently agreed to coproduce the Russian Sputnik V vaccine in Bangladesh.

He claimed that apart from the coproduction, Bangladesh would buy the vaccines from Russia.

“... they cannot fulfil the demand of Bangladesh. That’s why they agreed

to give us the formula but Bangladesh cannot share it with others,” he claimed.

Regarding the uncertainty of getting vaccines from Serum, Nazmul Hassan Papon, managing director of Beximco, Serum’s agent in Bangladesh, said Serum did not inform them anything about delays and that Serum was waiting for permission from the Ministry of External Affairs of India for exporting vaccines.

“We are hopeful that we will get vaccines and the ongoing vaccination programme will not be hampered,” he said.

Papon said they were also trying to get the same vaccines from other sources.

“We have written to AstraZeneca yesterday [Wednesday] to allow us to purchase vaccines from other sources. Serum is dedicated for this region. The same vaccine is produced in Thailand and South Korea. So we are trying to get vaccines from those sources too.”

Serum CEO Adar Poonawalla in an interview to NDTV yesterday said, “There is no clarity on exports and we also right now feel that we should not look at exports for two months during these cases. Maybe in June-July, we could start looking at small exports starting again.”

“Right now, we are going to prioritise the needs of the nation [India] first.”

The development comes when 75,77,889 jabs of Oxford-AstraZeneca vaccine out of 1.02 crore shots in stock were administered in Bangladesh, as of yesterday.

Bangladesh on December 13 last year signed a deal with Beximco to buy three

crore doses of Covishield, the brand Serum used for Oxford-AstraZeneca vaccines.

As per the deal, the government was supposed to get 50 lakh doses a month. But until yesterday, it only received 70 lakh doses in two instalments.

The Indian government had sent 33 lakh doses as gift.

Amid a steep rise in Covid cases in India and reports of shortage of vaccines, the Indian government reportedly paused vaccine exports last month to meet domestic demand.

Poonawalla said this situation would continue until at least July.

With Serum failing to comply with the agreement, Bangladesh government started exploring alternative sources for the shots in a desperate attempt to continue the ongoing inoculation drive.

Meanwhile, Indian High Commissioner to Bangladesh Vikram Doraiswami said India would try its best to supply Covid-19 vaccines to Bangladesh.

“We cannot do more than we have. But what we can assure Bangladesh is, we will do our best to ensure that within the limit of physical production -- whatever we can share -- we will share,” he said.

Terming India’s relationship with Bangladesh “very special”, he said, “We are all working together to try and deal with the crisis that we have.”

India is in a very difficult situation right now, he said, adding, “We are all trying together. Let’s see how best we can cooperate for the best interest of both the countries.”

Hasina pushes for \$100b funds

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mitigation as they contribute to carbon emissions the least but are affected more.

“Major economies, international financial institutions and private sectors should come forward for concessional climate financing as well as innovation,” the PM said on the first day of the two-day summit hosted virtually by US President Joe Biden.

Forty world leaders, including those from major carbon emitting countries like the USA, China, Russia, India, Japan, the UK, and Canada, as well as leaders from climate vulnerable nations and those who demonstrated innovations and leadership in tackling climate change are attending the summit.

President Biden called the summit days after returning to the Paris Climate Agreement from which his predecessor had pulled out. New hopes have been raised following Biden’s return to the Paris deal and then hosting the summit ahead of the COP26, to be held in Glasgow in November.

Hasina, president of Climate Vulnerable Forum, a grouping of 48 climate vulnerable countries, thanked Biden for convening the Summit and inviting her to speak to this august gathering. Deeply appreciating the

US’s return to the Paris deal, she said Bangladesh is keen to engage with the international community.

The PM also suggested pursuing Loss and Damage, a process that refers to the harms caused by anthropogenic climate change within the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC).

“The Covid-19 pandemic has reminded us that global crisis can only be addressed through strong collective response,” she added.

As a responsible member state of the COP, and as the CVF chair, Hasina suggested immediate and ambitious action plan by developed countries to reduce their carbon emissions to keep the global temperature rise to 1.5 degrees Celsius.

She said the developing nations should also focus on mitigation measures. “Focus is needed on green economy and carbon neutral technologies with provision of technology transfer among nations.”

The premier said despite being a climate vulnerable country with resource constraints, Bangladesh has emerged as a global leader on adaptation and mitigation.

Every year the country is spending about \$5 billion, about 2.5 percent of its GDP, on climate adaptation and resilience-building measures, she said, adding that the 1.1 million forcefully

displaced Rohingyas who took shelter in Bangladesh following the 2017 military crackdown in Rakhine worsened the country’s vulnerability.

Hasina said Bangladesh is pursuing a low carbon development path to raise the country’s Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC) and adaptation ambition. The country has also included new sectors in addition to the existing energy, industry and transport sectors in the mitigation process.

She said the Bangladesh government is planning to submit a quantified ambitious NDC by June this year.

Stating that Bangladesh is observing “Mujib Year”, marking the birth centenary of Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the PM said the government is planting 30 million saplings nationwide and has adopted “Mujib Climate Prosperity Plan” to achieve low carbon economic growth.

As the chair of the Climate Vulnerable Forum and V20, Bangladesh’s key focus is to uphold the interests of the climate vulnerable countries, she said.

South Asian regional office of the Global Centre on Adaptation, which is hosted by Bangladesh, is also promoting locally-led adaptation solutions, the PM added.

3 more Hefajat leaders

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Police arrested Maulana Sanaullah, executive member of Dhaka City Hefajat, at a madrasa in the capital’s New market area. He is also accused in the case filed with Paltan Police Station, said Jahidul Islam Sobag, assistant commissioner (Motijheel) at Dhaka Metropolitan Police. And a team of Detective Branch of Police in the afternoon arrested Hefajat’s Joint Office Secretary Maulana Ihteshamul Haque Sakhi in the capital’s Bangshal area.

FIVE ON REMAND
A Dhaka court yesterday placed four top leaders and an activist of Hefajat on different terms of remand in three cases filed with Paltan Police Station over the 2013 mayhem and recent violence in Dhaka.

They are: Hefajat Assistant Secretary General and Bangladesh Khelafat Majlishi Nayebe-e-Amir Khurshid Alam Kasemi, Khelafat Majlishi Joint Secretary General Mufti Sharafat Hossain, Hefajat Assistant Organising Secretary Ataulah

Ameen, Maulana Sanaullah, and Hefajat Dhaka City unit Vice-president Maulana Jubair Ahmed.

Khurshid and Sharafat were placed on a five-day remand in two separate cases filed in 2013 while Ataulah and Sanaullah were placed on a five-day remand in a case filed over the violence on March 26 this year.

Jubair was placed on a 10-day remand in two cases filed over the 2013 mayhem and the recent violence. He was brought to the court yesterday on completion of a five-day remand in another case filed in 2013.

Dhaka Metropolitan Magistrate Baki Billah passed the remand orders.

In the remand prayers, the investigation officer said the Hefajat leaders were directly involved in the mayhem in 2013 and March this year and they had to be placed on remand for the investigation.

A virtual court in Dhaka yesterday placed Rafiqul Islam Madani, widely known as “Shishu Bokta”, on a seven-

day remand in a case filed with Motijheel Police Station under the Digital Security Act for making “inciting speech”.

Dhaka Metropolitan Magistrate Abu Sufian Md Noman passed the order.

Another court on Wednesday placed Rafiqul, who was arrested by Rab on April 7, on a nine-day remand in two cases filed with Tejgaon and Motijheel police stations.

PBI INVESTIGATING 16 CASES

“We received the cases last week and are investigating them,” PBI Chief Banaj Kumar Majumder told The Daily Star.

Investigators are collecting video footage of the violence and the inciting speeches that Hefajat leaders started removing from social media since the crackdown began, he said.

The cases were filed with different police stations in Chattogram, Narayanganj, Munshiganj, Kishoreganj and Brahmanbaria.

On April 18, 23 other cases against Hefajat leaders were handed over to the Criminal Investigation Department.

More than 1,700 detained at pro-Navalny rallies across Russia

AFP, Moscow

More than 1,700 people were detained by police at rallies in support of jailed Kremlin critic Alexei Navalny in dozens of cities across Russia, an independent monitor reported yesterday.

Thousands of people took to the streets Wednesday evening to demanded freedom and proper medical attention for Navalny, who has been hunger strike for three weeks in a penal colony outside Moscow.

The opposition staged demonstrations in dozens of Russian cities, with the largest rallies taking place in Moscow.

The OVD-Info monitoring group, which tracks detentions at opposition protests, said that by yesterday morning police had detained “more than 1,783 people in 97 cities”.

In Russia, participation in unauthorised demonstrations can lead to a fine or several days in jail.

57pc still unemployed

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of Rana Plaza survivors have not improved significantly and their overall quality of life has not enhanced much in the last eight years, the survey concluded.

Their conditions instead have become more miserable as the majority of them have been jobless, while the income of most of the employed survivors has decreased drastically due to Covid-19 induced economic fallout, according to the study.

The survey was conducted on 200 survivors, 63 percent of whom were female.

Of the employed survivors, 43 percent of them are engaged in various types of wages and self-employment where the household income of 37.5 percent is between Tk 5,001 and Tk 10,300. The majority of survivors have an average expenditure of over Tk 10,000, it said.

As per the survey, the physical conditions of 14 percent of the survivor are worsening and they have reported that they are still bearing with headaches, pain in arms, legs and their backs.

Besides, a total of 4.5 percent survivors have improved their mental health than last year, it said.

After the devastating Rana Plaza collapse, many could not return to work due to physical and mental health conditions, the study said.

Speaking as the chief guest at the event, Lawmaker Shirin Akhter said the labour law should be implemented properly, while compensation laws need to be enacted.

Tuomo Poutiainen, country director of the International Labour Organisation, said, “There is a requirement to improve security and governance on labour issues and this needs institutional change. We have to create a culture of health safety for workers in factories and the government needs to enact legislation to ensure this.”

He also called for a new way of thinking about social security during the Covid-19 pandemic to creating new jobs.

Dr Khondokar Golam Moazzem, research director of Centre for Policy Dialogue, said since the Rana Plaza collapse, there has been no positive change in the victims’ lives. Despite some financial assistance, the process of reintegration of injured workers in the formal sector has not been introduced. They have to be brought under the reintegration process, he said.

He called for the distribution of free health cards from the Rana Plaza Trust Fund to ensure the medical treatment of injured workers. He also proposed the provision of health insurance for the survivors.

It is disappointing that Bangladesh has yet to come up with an effective employment scheme although many years of Rana Plaza collapse have passed, said Werner Lange, cluster coordinator, textile and leather of CIZ. He also emphasised introducing the Employment Injury Insurance (EII) Scheme for workers.

Dr Hameeda Hossain, convener, Sramik Nirapotta Forum, urged the authorities concerned to establish a monument in the memory of the deceased workers. She also called for ensuring the safety of workers by introducing insurance schemes.

Stating that about 1,000 workers die in various accidents in the country every year, Rajekuzzaman Ratan, general secretary of Somajtantrik Sramik Front, said the social security project needs to be implemented.

While moderating the virtual dialogue, Farah Kabir, country director of ActionAid Bangladesh, said, “Even in eight years, the conditions of significant surviving workers are not satisfactory... We have to come out of the colonial mentality and fulfil the just demands of the workers.”

Accidents like the Rana Plaza collapse could happen again and that is why everyone should be made aware of insurance schemes, self-development skills or special fund formation and emergency activities, she said.

Tazul Islam, senior sustainability coordinator of s Oliver and Salahuddin Bablu, business editor of SATV, also spoke among others in the virtual dialogue.