

STOCKS		COMMODITIES		ASIAN MARKETS				CURRENCIES			
Week-on-week		As of Friday		Friday Closings				As on Thursday			
DSEX	CSCX	Gold	Oil	MUMBAI	TOKYO	SINGAPORE	SHANGHAI	USD	EUR	GBP	CNY
▲ 1.01%	▲ 1.08%	\$1,807.98	\$75.55	▼ 0.35%	▼ 0.63%	▲ 0.77%	▼ 0.04%	83.95	97.92	114.79	12.71
6,212.77	10,810.81	(per ounce)	(per barrel)	52,386.19	27,940.42	3,131.40	3,524.09	BUY TK	101.72	118.59	13.37
								SELL TK			

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BUSINESS

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Non-RMG workers left uncared for

Factories get little attention in safe workplace drive

REFAYET ULLAH MIRDHA, JAGARAN CHAKMA and AHSAN HABIB

Hardly any improvement in workplace safety has taken place at the non-garment factories over the years as the authorities were primarily bogged down in fixing the loopholes in the apparel industry.

Such lax attitude on the part of the government allowed the breaches of rules to go on, triggering frequent industrial incidents and the death of innocent workers like the country witnessed on Thursday.

Although the industry people, the government and international communities said both the Tazreen Fashions Fire and the Rana Plaza building collapse, respectively in 2012 and 2013, were a wake-up call for Bangladesh, the safety concern was largely ignored in the workplaces at non-garment industries.

Despite the twin deadliest industrial incidents, the owners and the authorities did not take any lessons to improve the working conditions to save the lives of crores of workers employed in the non-RMG sectors.

The devastating fire incident on Thursday at Hashem Foods Ltd at Ruppangj in Narayanganj is a glaring example of ignoring workplace safety measures. At least 52 workers died in the inferno at the juice processing plant.

Many survivors said the emergency evacuation routes

were not easily accessible to move out of the upper floors, and the collapsible gates of various floors were locked. The ground floor was piled up with raw materials, which occupied the exit ways.

As a result, the workers were screaming in the thick and dark smoke before dying in the fire that continued throughout the night as it took time for the firefighters to douse it.

"Most of the focus was given to the improvement of workplace safety in the export-oriented garment industry. No visible initiative has been taken to improve workplace safety in the non-garment sectors," said Khondaker Golam Moazzem, research director of the Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD).

The safety inspections led by the Department of Inspection for Factories and Establishments (DIFE) mostly took place in garment factories to see if workers get salaries and other entitled benefits and they use child labour.

"We have seen fire incidents at chemical warehouses and plastic factories in old Dhaka. The rising incidences of the explosion of boilers and gas cylinders in garment and other sectors point to new areas of concern in the industrial sector. Overall, workplace safety in non-RMG sectors has not improved," Moazzem said.

There is no proper monitoring of fire safety issues and

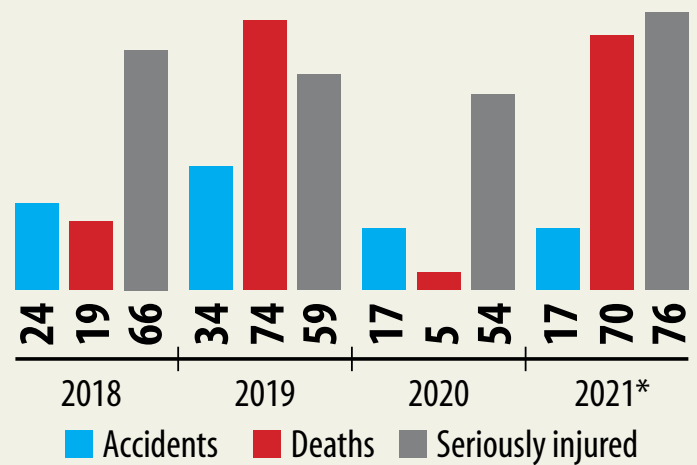


ANISUR RAHMAN

Temperatures reached such extremes during the Hashem Foods factory fire on Thursday that even this massive portion of a concrete floor ultimately collapsed.

ACCIDENTS IN NON-RMG FACTORIES

In number; *Until Friday; SOURCE: BILS



compliance of building codes at the non-garment sectors, said Razequzzaman Ratan, president of Samajtantrik Sramik Front, a labour rights group.

"Hashem Foods also violated the labour law by hiring children and keeping the main gate locked."

He said the garment sector, which accounts for 85 per cent of Bangladesh's exports, received priority in the drive aimed at ensuring a safe workplace because of the pressure from buyers, brands, the European Union, and workers.

Wajedul Islam Khan, general secretary of the Bangladesh Trade Union Kendra, blamed the gross negligence and inefficiency of the DIFE for the fire incident at Ruppangj.

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Union leaders demand adequate compensation

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Various labour rights organisations yesterday demanded exemplary punishment for those responsible for the death of at least 52 workers in a fire at the Hashem Foods factory in Ruppangj upazila of Narayanganj district.

They also asked for adequate compensation to be provided to the families of the deceased workers as well as survivors of the incident.

The leaders of various trade union bodies demanded full compensation for the potential lifetime income loss by the workers as well as proper treatment and rehabilitation for those injured.

Hashem Foods, a concern of Sajeeb Group, retails various beverages, baked goods, jelly, and condiments under the Sajeeb brand. The company also produces Shezan, a mango flavoured drink, under a technical collaboration with Shezan International.

Officials said Sajeeb pays royalties to Shezan and Idilia for producing the brand in Bangladesh.

With an annual turnover of nearly Tk 600 crore, Sajeeb Group employs nearly 1,600 workers, said its chief executive officer, Mohammad Shahan Shah Azad, on Friday.

Sajeeb Group has also been engaged in exporting processed foods, which in fiscal 2020-21 amounted to nearly \$10 million.

Workers' rights bodies, citing the fire incident at Hashem Foods, said the factory did not provide a safe working environment. From the announcement of the fire service department, it appears that there were no firefighting arrangements in the factory.

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Step up workplace safety: ILO

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

There is an urgent need for relevant authorities and factory owners in Bangladesh to ensure safe working environments at local production units, said International Labour Organization (ILO) in a statement issued yesterday.

The comment reflects on Thursday's fire at a factory of Hashem Foods, a concern of Sajeeb Group, in Narayanganj that claimed the lives of at least 52 people.

This incident illustrates the importance of keeping adequate safety measures in place at any factory, where thousands of workers typically spend the better part of their day, said the labour standards body.

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STIMULUS FOR SMALL BUSINESSES, FARMERS

Public agencies fail to disburse whole fund

MAHMUDUL HASAN and SUKANTA HALDER

Government and semi-government agencies failed to disburse the entire Tk 570 crore earmarked for the pandemic-hit small traders, entrepreneurs and farmers for the last fiscal year under a stimulus package.

The agencies that haven't been able to start the disbursement or have done it partially blamed the worsening pandemic situation, lack of bank accounts among the potential recipients, and the difficulty in selecting the real recipients for the slow pace of execution.

In January, the government allocated Tk 1,500 crore under the stimulus package, and eight government and semi-government agencies received Tk 570 crore in March for the last fiscal year.

The rest will be disbursed in the

current fiscal year.

The agencies are the SME Foundation, the Palli Daridro Bimochon Foundation (PDBF), Joyeeta Foundation, the Bangladesh Small and Cottage Industries Corporation (BSCIC), the Small Farmer Development Foundation (SFDF), the Bangladesh Rural Development Board (BRDB), the Social Development Foundation (SDF), and the Bangladesh NGO Foundation.

The agencies had to formulate a policy to lend to the cottage, micro and small enterprises in rural areas with no access to formal banking channels.

Only two agencies - SME Foundation and the BSCIC - pulled off the disbursement target set for the fiscal year of 2020-21.

The dismal disbursement rate

has kept pace with the slower-than-expected implementation of the broader stimulus packages rolled out for the CMSEs after the pandemic hit Bangladesh.

Of the eight agencies, the PDBF, which received Tk 100 crore for FY21, hasn't started the disbursement yet.

"As many of the recipients have no bank accounts and the pandemic situation is not good, it is getting delayed," said Shahidul Haque Khan, acting director of the foundation.

Finding out the right entrepreneurs is another challenge, he said. "Hopefully, we can start giving out loans before Eid."

Joyeeta Foundation received Tk 10 crore for FY21. It has just initiated the process in association with Brac Bank.

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DEFAULTED LOANS

Cash recovery nosedives

AKM ZAMIR UDDIN

Cash recovery from defaulted loans declined sharply in the first quarter of this year as business activities of the beleaguered clients in Bangladesh worsened due to the economic hardship stemming from the Covid-19 pandemic.

Banks collectively recovered Tk 1,585 crore, down 23 per cent from three months earlier and 7 per cent from a year ago, showed data from Bangladesh Bank.

Lenders are also struggling to settle pending cases with the money loan courts as many of them are unable to operate their normal activities because of the strict restrictions on movement, said bankers.

This has had an adverse impact on the recovery process.

Banks usually recover more than Tk 2,000 crore from their defaulted loans per quarter, but their efforts

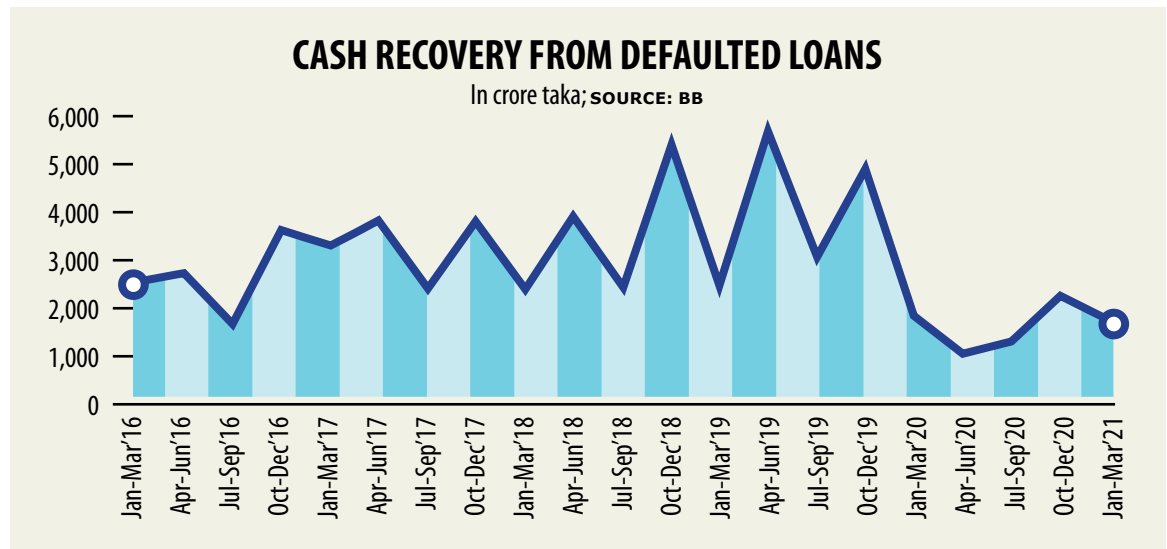
started to face a roadblock when the Covid-19 arrived on the shores of the country in March last year.

A Bangladesh Bank official

said defaulted loans in banks had increased alarmingly in the first quarter at a time when cash recovery from non-performing loans (NPLs)

declined substantially, sounding the alarm of a possible threat for the banking sector.

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POST-LDC ERA

Negotiate intensively for patent waiver

Says Debapriya Bhattacharya

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Bangladesh should launch intensive negotiations with World Trade Organization (WTO) members to secure the benefits of the platform's agreement on the Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS), said a noted economist yesterday.

This should continue even after Bangladesh makes the United Nations status graduation from a least developed to a developing country in 2026, said Debapriya Bhattacharya at a virtual discussion with a group of journalists.

The WTO General Council will discuss the extension of the TRIPS benefits for both the LDCs and those who made the status graduation in a meeting in Geneva on July 26-27.



Debapriya Bhattacharya

"...Bangladesh - in view of the upcoming General Council meeting - needs to mount a robust negotiating effort and demonstrate necessary political initiative," said Bhattacharya, a former Bangladesh ambassador to the WTO.

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