

The Daily Star

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Accidents or murders?

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Today is May Day, International Workers Day. This year May Day is being observed in Bangladesh at a very crucial, vulnerable and emotional time. More than 300 of our labourer brothers and sisters died when a garments factory collapsed in Savar on April 24.

We are very sorry that we couldn't save them. They came to earn their livelihood but returned to the eternal world. We know about the role of the owner of the market, and of the owners of the garment factories. All types of media are very active to inform the people about the incident. Like on a cricket score board, we count the death toll, and the number of those rescue and injured. Through breaking news we are always updated on the current status of the victims. The media has been very busy — but the point is, what will happen now?

After a week there will be no sign of the collapsed Rana Plaza. Donations will be stopped, and no one will ask about the injured people, their future and their families. News about the incident will be shifted from the front page to the last page.

We appreciate the role of our army, other rescue teams and the local people who have been giving their best to save the victims. Some victims' relatives claimed that they didn't get the amount of money which they were promised. There is no chance of getting compensation from the owners of the garments factory because of the weakness of company law. The government, the labour ministry, and BGME members will give compensation to the victims.

This is not the first such accident in Bangladesh. After each incident, there was a lot of discussion about how to give protection to the victims, formulate building construction laws, corruption in Rajuk, factory owners' carelessness, etc. But what results have we got till now, after so many hours of discussion? Nothing. The conscience of the owners has been lost under the rubble of the collapsed building. They don't feel any guilt; they only want to get profit from their

business.

Hundreds of hours are spent in discussion in talk shows, discussion programmes, interviews, etc. to find out solutions and mete out punishment. But all these will be futile if the law implementers and the law breakers do not change. Victor Hugo said: “A man is not idle because he is absorbed in thought. There is visible labour and there is invisible labour.” We are giving our invisible labour by providing solutions, now it is the duty of the authorities to show their visible labour by implementing laws.

Everyone is happy that Sohel Rana has been arrested. But that is not enough. He should be given exemplary punishment. Hundreds of such Sohel Ranas are around us. They have to be identified. We don't want any more Sohel Rana and Rana Plaza. This must be the last occurrence in Bangladesh.

For Bangladesh, the garments sector is like a gold mine. We earn a lot of money from this sector and lacs of women are employed in the factories. Why should they and our country be losers because of these Sohel Ranas? Our reputation has been severely affected in the international market. If our foreign buyers stop buying our products, what will we do? For various domestic reasons our other industries, like jute, are not doing well, so we cannot allow our garments sector to be destroyed.

Martin Luther King Jr. said: “All labour that uplifts humanity has dignity and importance and should be undertaken with painstaking excellence.” Workers of Rana Plaza were forced to work in the cracked building to save their jobs. The owners didn't show any mercy or humanity. By sacrificing their lives they opened our eyes.

The fire service department needs more modern equipments for rescue purposes. Every aspect of a building — planning, structure, foundation, fire exit etc. — must be regularly checked. BGME has to be strict when admitting new members, and should also monitor the members regularly.

Improvements to the national labour law are much needed now. Every part of the law should be pro-labourer. How many dead bodies are needed to shake our conscience? Will we be forced to think that these kinds of incidents are murders, not accidents?

Leonardo da Vinci said: “Thou, O God, dost sell us all good things at the price of labour.” This is the price we gave to our labourers. Their sacrifice can't be futile.

Let us pray to God to send the martyred souls to heaven. There is no labour a person does that is undignified, so let us give them a salute. John D. Rockefeller said: "I believe in the dignity of labour, whether with head or hand; that the world owes no man a living but that it owes every man an opportunity to make a living."
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