



International  
Labour  
Organization

# RANA PLAZA

TWO YEARS ON

Progress made & challenges ahead  
for the Bangladesh RMG sector

April 2015

## Acknowledgments

ILO's activities in Bangladesh have been delivered in coordination with numerous headquarters departments and other offices in the region.

Recognition must be made to:

The Governance and Tripartism Department, Partnerships and Field Support Department, Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific, the Decent Work Technical Support Team in New Delhi, International Training Centre in Turin, the Deputy Director General's Office for Field Operations and Partnerships, the Social Protection Department, the Standards Department, the Bureau for Workers' Activities (ACTRAV), Bureau for Employers' Activities (ACT/EMP) and Department for Communications (DCOMM).



## Message

Since the collapse of Rana Plaza and the Tazreen Fashions fire an unprecedented effort has taken place to enhance workplace safety and improve workers' rights in Bangladesh's Ready Made Garment (RMG) sector.

Significant improvements have been made, a number of which are highlighted in this publication.

Key amongst these are legislative changes, with the revision of the Bangladesh Labour Act introducing new safety measures and making it slightly easier to form trade unions.

Almost three-quarters of export-oriented garment factories nationwide have been inspected for structural and fire safety with many also undertaking remediation efforts.

The capacity of the regulatory authorities such as the Labour Inspectorate and Fire Service have been boosted so they are better able to carry out an effective monitoring and oversight role. Rana Plaza survivors have been able to learn new skills while 70 percent compensation has also been paid to some 3,490 victims and their dependants.

Meanwhile, employers and workers organizations are taking an active role in training mid-level managers,

supervisors and trade union leaders on occupational safety and health as well as workers' rights issues.

A wide range of stakeholders have played an important role in this process. This reflects a new dynamic for the Bangladesh RMG sector. Government, employers, workers' organizations, brands and retailers, development partners, civil society and international organisations such as ILO are working together for a common cause.

Although much has been done, considerable challenges still lie ahead. Remediation work in all factories under the Accord, Alliance and the national initiative must be completed.

We must seek to ensure that Bangladesh readies its institutional, regulatory and oversight mechanisms to ensure a safe working environment once support from external partners ends.

Progress in enhancing safety must be matched by similar improvements in workers rights. Learning lessons from the Rana Plaza collapse and efforts to provide compensation to victims an Employee Injury Insurance scheme should be developed. This would benefit workers and the industry alike.

Further legislative changes are needed to bring down the threshold for the formation of unions while the Implementation Rules for the Labour Act need to be issued without further delay. There should be equal rights for workers in Export Processing Zones and the capacity of employers and workers organisations to engage in social dialogue and build trust supported.

Together, much has been done and together much has been achieved. Yet this remains a work in progress and we must not allow momentum to slow or urgency to fade if we are to help ensure a brighter future for the Bangladesh RMG sector and all those who work in it.

**Srinivas B Reddy**  
Country Director ILO Bangladesh

# A changing dynamic in the RMG sector

The loss of 1,136 lives when Rana Plaza collapsed on 24 April 2013 sent shockwaves worldwide. Coming just months after the fatal fire at Tazreen Fashions in which 112 died it was clear that the Bangladesh Ready Made Garment (RMG) sector had reached a crucial juncture.

Following Rana Plaza business could not continue as usual. Fundamental changes relating to safety, inspection and compliance had to be made if the lives of over four million workers were to be safeguarded and the confidence of global buyers retained. Global supply chain governance and compliance with international labour standards came under intense scrutiny.

Following the Tazreen fire in November 2012 a framework for the enhancement of fire safety in Bangladesh was developed in the form of a Tripartite Statement to enhance fire safety. This was signed by government, workers' and employers' representatives in January 2013.

Just a matter of months later, following the collapse of Rana Plaza ILO Deputy Director General Gilbert Houngbo led a high-level ILO mission to Bangladesh. This played a critical role to facilitate dialogue between the government, employers, workers, development partners and other stakeholders. It helped identify further key areas

for action that led to the issue of a tripartite Joint Statement on safety and rights on 4 May 2013. The Joint Statements, and the process that led to them, signified a change in the dynamics of the Bangladesh garment industry. It reflected a clear commitment by the Government of Bangladesh to work with the employers and workers to improve safety of the RMG sector, steps later detailed in the National Tripartite Plan of Action (NTPA). It also saw considerable engagement with, and input from unions, brands and retailers as well as development partners. Engagement which has continued to this day.

Importantly, ILO strongly advocated for buyers worldwide to 'stay with Bangladesh'; that despite the challenges the RMG industry faced they could be addressed and that any rush for the exit by international brands would have far reaching consequences for the estimated 4.2 million garment workers, many of whom are women.



*Rana Plaza was a call for global action to improve safety and working conditions in factories producing goods for consumers worldwide. While progress has been made in Bangladesh, more needs to be done to make the world's factories and workplaces safe and decent places to work. We need to ensure global supply chains perform in line with internationally respected labour standards, so that goods, wherever produced, are made in conditions of decent work.*

**Guy Ryder, Director-General,  
International Labour Organization**



*Since Rana Plaza the Government of Bangladesh has joined hands with both local and international stakeholders to enhance safety and working conditions in the RMG sector. Much has been achieved but we all recognize that this must be an ongoing process. We cannot fail in our endeavors as the lives and livelihoods of many millions of Bangladeshi's depend on us.*

**Mikhail Shipar, Secretary,  
Ministry of Labour and  
Employment, Government  
of Bangladesh.**

# Enhanced collaboration and commitment

Following Rana Plaza, local and international organizations rapidly signalled their commitment to contribute to relief efforts. As part of the Joint Statement issued on 4 May 2013 agreement was reached on the need for the inspection of all RMG factories as well as the development of longer-term processes to enhance inspection and compliance. Expectations for change were high and deadlines short, often unrealistically so.

*In the two years since the Rana Plaza collapse the ready-made garment industry has undergone considerable change. Workplace safety has become the priority and as employers we are working closely with our partners to ensure that there can be no repeat of past disasters. We are committed to continuing along the path of growth yet in a manner that does not compromise on safety or the rights of workers.*

**Tapan Chowdhury,  
President, Bangladesh  
Employers Federation**

In view of the urgent need to address RMG safety issues programmes and initiatives needed to be operational without delay.

A strong local collaboration and coordination effort was required with the Private Sector Development Group of the Local Consultative Groups (LCGs) coordinated by the Netherlands Embassy playing an important role in bringing together key stakeholders and coordinating further action.

ILO developed the Improving Working Conditions in the Ready Made Garment Sector Programme with the support of Canada, the Netherlands, and the United Kingdom in just three months, launching it on 22 October 2013.

In quick succession, other key initiatives were also formed. The Bangladesh Accord on Fire and Building Safety, signed by over 150 apparel corporations from 20 countries, global and local trade

unions, NGOs and workers' rights groups was created on 13 May 2013. Meanwhile, the Alliance for Bangladesh Worker Safety bringing together 26 mainly North American brands was established on 9 July 2013.

The role and actions of the Accord and Alliance represent an unprecedented contribution and commitment by international brands and retailers towards enhancing conditions in the Bangladesh RMG sector.

Both the Accord and Alliance have carried out intensive inspection programmes of the factories their members source from. Remediation work has been facilitated while fire and occupational safety and health standards in factories have also been enhanced. In addition, both groups have provided valuable support to the national initiative by freely sharing their expertise and experience.



A range of other organisations have also made significant contributions to enhancing safety in the sector. For example, the ILO's US Department of Labor-funded project to enhance fire and building safety is enhancing the regulatory framework while building capacity of the fire service. German development agency GIZ is also working to train the labour inspectorate as well as providing equipment and resources for the fire service.

## Compact for sustainable and long-term change

**A Sustainability Compact to promote continuous improvements in labour rights and factory safety in the Ready Made Garment and Knitwear Industry in Bangladesh was launched by the European Union and governments of Bangladesh and USA with support from ILO on 8 July 2013. It sets out a series of commitments and deadlines for changes relating to safety, legislation and working conditions as well as their effective implementation and enforcement.**

**At its most recent review in October 2014 progress made including the development of harmonised inspection standards and legislative changes leading to the formation of new unions was recognised. However the review highlighted that more still needed to be done with regards to labour inspectorate capacity and freedom of association amongst others.**

# A better legislative environment

In the aftermath of Rana Plaza it was clear that fundamental legislative and regulatory changes needed to be made. The revision of the Bangladesh Labour Act (2006) was identified as a priority to create a solid foundation upon which safety and better workers rights in the RMG sector could be built.

*At Rana Plaza we lost many workers. If things did not change maybe more workers would die. We all want a safer industry and lots of people are making a big effort to achieve this. Employers now seem to care more about workers' rights. However, union registration remains very low and there are still barriers to the formation of new unions. Many employers also still think that unions are against productivity while the opposite is true. The situation is better but there is still a long way to go.*

**Abdul Mukit Khan,**  
**Chairperson National**  
**Coordination Committee**  
**for Workers Education**

## Growth of Labour Unions in RMG Sector

End of  
**2012 ▶ 132**

March  
**2015 ▶ 437**

The process of reviewing the Labour Act commenced in May 2013 with the revised Act adopted by the Parliament on 15 July 2014. The speed with which these changes took place was significant and sent a strong signal that the Government of Bangladesh is committed to enhancing labour standards.

Major changes introduced by the new Labour Act included the simplification of provisions relating to the registration of trade unions. This has led to significant growth in the number of unions in the RMG sector. A central fund is to be created to improve living standards of workers. The Act stipulates that safety and health committees including members of the workforce must be established in every factory with over 50 workers. Meanwhile, other mandatory measures include the setting up of dispensaries and clinics in factories.

ILO used its expertise in this field to facilitate the process. It advocated strongly for the revision with government ministries while also giving testimony before the parliamentary standing committee as to the need for changes. Advice and support

was provided to employers' and workers' organizations and ILO experts examined several drafts of the revised Labour Act, making comments and suggestions at every stage.

Although the new Labour Act still falls short with regards to ILO Conventions 87 and 98 on Freedom of Association and Collective Bargaining the revisions provide a firmer foundation for more equitable labour practices that can and will continue to be built upon. Priority at time of writing is being placed on the finalisation of rules that will enable implementation of the new provisions, This is of especial interest for the ILO's Better Work programme in the RMG sector. It is also necessary for the formation of Occupational Safety and Health Committees. In addition, a credible dispute resolution system must be built to ensure that the newly reinforced rights for freedom of association are respected and problems addressed systematically and effectively.



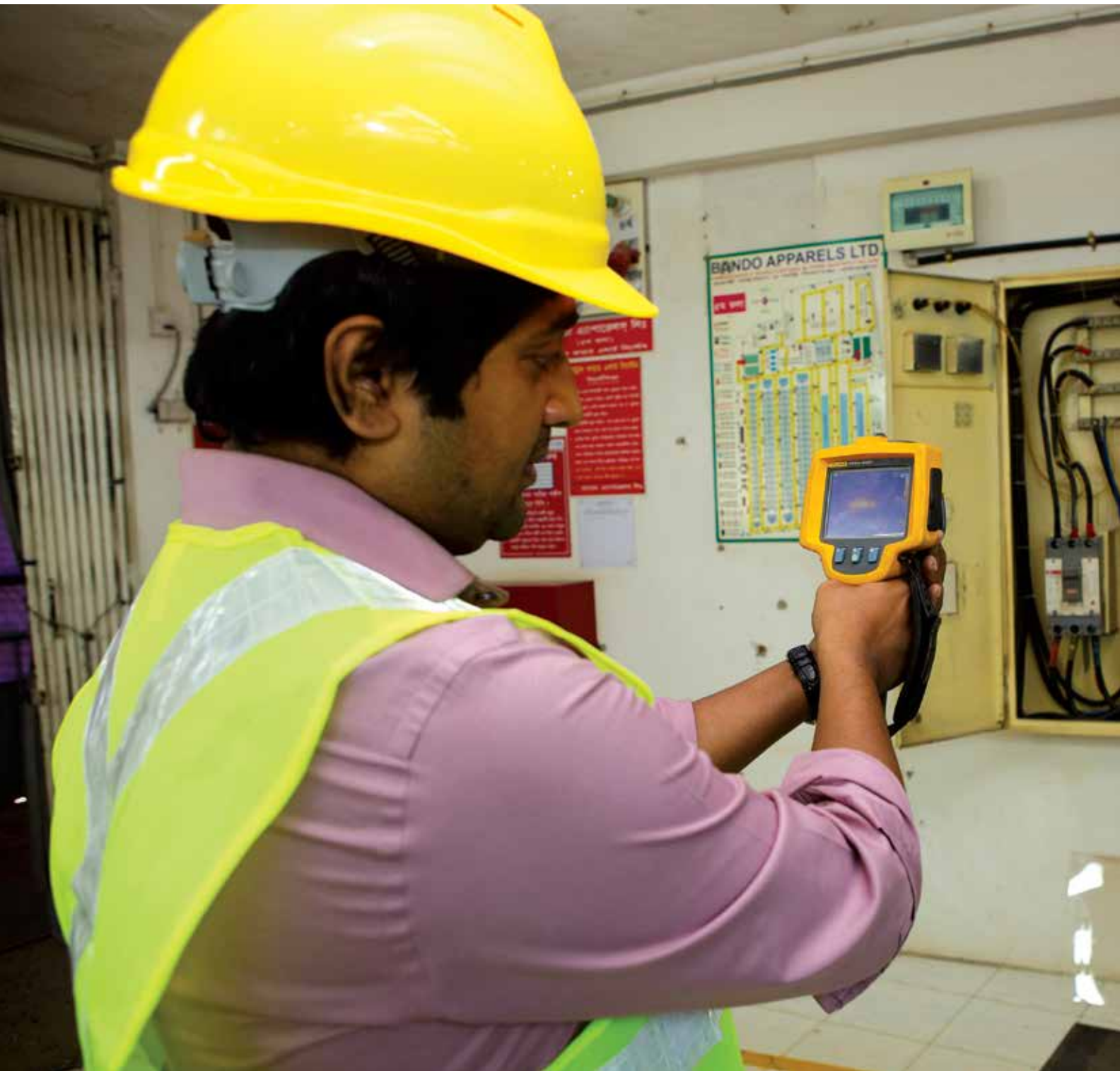


**IDENTIFICATION CARD**

Employee No	10000000	
Staff Name	Ms. Jyoti Shinde	
Department	Learning & Dev.	
Joining Date	01/01/2020	
Position	Asst. Secy.	

# Towards safer RMG factories

Following the Rana Plaza collapse the immediate priority was to inspect all 3,508 export-oriented Ready Made Garment factories throughout Bangladesh for structural, fire and electrical safety. By the end of March 2015, 2,500 factories had been inspected by the Accord and Alliance as well as a National Initiative supported by ILO with funding from Canada, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom.



## Structural inspections of RMG factories

Export-oriented factories

**3,508**

Inspected under National Initiative

**668**

Inspected under the Accord

**1,219**

Inspected under the Alliance

**613**

Total inspected

**2,500**



The RMG factory inspection process has had to overcome a series of challenges. An intense and ongoing period of coordination and collaboration has seen common inspection standards agreed between the initiatives based on the Bangladesh National Building Code and international good practices.

A common reporting template was developed to ensure consistency between inspection reports produced by different groups. It was also agreed that only the Government of Bangladesh would have the right to close any RMG plant deemed dangerously unsafe in recognition of its ultimate responsibility for workplace safety.

ILO played a central role in facilitating stakeholder cooperation in what have at times been complex negotiations. However, the process of harmonisation is a significant achievement that has helped create a solid foundation not only for the current round of inspections but also one on which the Bangladesh inspection service can build for the future.

As inspections have progressed emphasis has increasingly been placed on the development of

Corrective Action Plans and follow up remediation work. ILO has worked to build capacity of the Department of Inspections of Factories and Establishments (DIFE) to establish internal management processes to effectively follow up on the findings of fire and structural inspections in a systematic, comprehensive and transparent manner. The Fire Service and Civil Defense Department as well as the Capital Development Authority (RAJUK) have also been involved in this process in view of their important role relating to fire and building safety.

Likewise, the Accord and Alliance have worked with partner factories to undertake remediation efforts and have also lent their considerable expertise in this regard to the national initiative.

Rapid completion of remaining inspections under the national initiative is a high priority although challenges due to outdated contact details and resistance from some factories need to be overcome. Support and cooperation from the government, BGMEA, BKMEA and their members is critical in this regard.

*There have been huge changes. Many things have improved and it's much safer now than two years ago. For example, we have put higher priority on safer exits and installed proper fire doors. Factory owners are now very much more aware. The capacity of inspectors has also improved. Before Tazreen or Rana Plaza people did not seem interested. Now they are much more serious. Now their work is being done practically and properly.*

**M A Rahim, Vice Chairman and Group CEO, DBL Group**

*When the Tazreen and Rana plaza disasters took place within six months they were a real eye opener for us. However these incidents give us the opportunity to improve ourselves. We have increased the number of fire inspectors and are carrying out regular inspections. A lot of training is taking place in factories and we have increased the professionalism, strength and confidence of volunteer forces who can hold fires until the fire brigade arrives. Factory owners are also much more serious and come to us for advice about changing water pumps or fire doors. We are taking a lot more initiatives and we are all more positive. Everyone is trying to improve.*

**Brigadier General Ali Ahmed Khan, Director General, Fire Service and Civil Defence Department**



# Increased capacity of oversight bodies

The Tazreen and Rana Plaza disasters brought into stark relief the lack of capacity at all levels in Bangladesh to effectively ensure safety and acceptable working conditions in the RMG sector. Considerable effort has therefore been placed on boosting the skills of regulatory oversight bodies.

## Government funding for Labour Inspectorate

2013 – 2014

**US\$ 900,000**

2014 – 2015

**US\$ 3 million**

2015 – 2016

**US\$ 9 million**

## Number of Labour Inspectors

June

**2013 ▶ 92**

March

**2015 ▶ 276**

## Labour inspectorate

Following the collapse of Rana Plaza it was clear that the labour inspectorate required a complete overhaul if it was to be effective. As a result, the Government of Bangladesh made a series of major commitments to rebuild the Department of Inspections of Factories and Establishments (DIFE).

The inspection service was upgraded to a department in January 2014, high-level leadership installed, positions for 392 new inspectors created and budget boosted from US\$ 900,000 in 2013-14 to US\$ 9 million for 2015-2016.

By April 2015, 197 new inspectors had been recruited, taking the total to 276. Although the recruitment of inspectors is a positive development, both new and existing staff need intensive capacity building. ILO, with the support of Canada, the Netherlands and United Kingdom, and other organizations such as GIZ are implementing a comprehensive

programme of activities to train inspectors as well as to enhance governance and accountability of the labour inspection system.

Basic equipment such as motorcycles, office and inspection equipment is being provided to DIFE so that it can function effectively. A labour inspection road map has furthermore been agreed between ILO and the Ministry of Labour that forms the basis for ILO support to this reform process.

Meanwhile, the planned establishment of an accountability unit within DIFE as well as the launch of a public data base and website where inspection reports can be accessed represent a step towards transparency and openness for the inspection service.

## Fire service

Recognizing the vital role of the Fire Service and Civil Defence Department (FSCD), emphasis has been placed on enhancing its capacity to carry out inspections and respond to incidents. The Government of Bangladesh has

boosted the strength of the FSCD with the number of fire service staff working as inspectors up from 55 to 265.

ILO, with support from the US Department of Labor, is supporting this process by providing comprehensive training. A core of master trainers has been created within FSCD to build the skills of colleagues nationwide. Fire Service staff can now more effectively inspect factories, develop emergency action plans and carry out evacuation drills to

ensure factory occupants evacuate buildings safely when the alarm sounds. Accord and Alliance have also carried out training at factory-floor level that has boosted the fire safety skills of millions of workers.

### Occupational safety and health

Building a culture of Occupational Safety and Health and the skills to implement it is a major challenge for the RMG sector. Efforts are therefore underway to reinforce the capacity of workers, supervisors and managers in the

sector to improve the safety of their workplaces. Through training and education and the support of broad awareness campaigns and materials, workers and employers will benefit from improved safety practices and be better able to fulfill the objectives of the National Action Plan on Fire and Building Safety while exercising their rights and responsibilities.



*The accidents at Rana Plaza and Tazreen Fashions were significant wakeup calls for us. Since then there has been a paradigm shift in the mindset of entrepreneurs. Tremendous progress has been achieved in safety inspection, awareness, and other occupational safety and health issues. Our industry is undergoing transformation in a way that can be an example for textile and apparel industries around the world.*

**Md. Atiqul Islam, President, Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA)**



### A better equipped Fire Service

ILO, through the support of the US Department of Labor, is providing the Fire Service and Civil Defence Department (FSCD) with a fire training facility which will be used to create realistic training conditions for the Fire Service to practice putting out fires and carrying out rescues. German development agency GIZ has also provided equipment and training for mini fire brigades which will be the first responders to fires before the fire service arrives.

*Our inspectors are now better trained and more confident. When they visit factories they feel they have the ability to ask any question on violations of labour law. We will continue to develop the capacity of our staff so they can carry out inspections independently with full knowledge, dedication and authority.*

**Syed Ahmed, Inspector General, Department of Inspections for Factories and Establishments**

## Farzana's story



Photo: Shaifqui Alam Kiron

**Since the Rana Plaza collapse there has been a sustained effort to enhance the capacity and efficiency of the Labour Inspectorate. ILO is supporting this process through its Working Conditions in the Ready Made Garment Sector Programme funded by the Netherlands, Canada and the UK. Amongst the newly recruited inspectors trained by ILO is 27-year-old Farzana Islam.**

“I applied for this job when I saw it advertised in the newspaper by the Ministry of Labour and Employment and joined on 24 December 2013. I was mostly inspired by Rana Plaza. I was looking to do something that could help the workers. Most do not know their rights or responsibilities and that’s why I applied.

I have had a lot of training from ILO which has helped a lot. I also accompanied senior labour inspectors when they visited factories and this also really taught me to know how to do the job.

“When we visit factories we have a checklist and we will fill it in with the factory registration number, number of workers, management names etc. Then we visit the factory floors from top to bottom. We look at fire safety, floor layout and make sure everything is ok.

“Female workers are perhaps more happy to speak to me. If my male colleagues ask, ‘When was your

last holiday?’ they do not get an answer. But if I ask them ‘What is your husband doing? What is your child doing? When was your last holiday?’ Then she will answer that, ‘My last holiday was not a holiday as I had to work late at night.’

“When Rana Plaza collapsed there were rules about where the generator could be but they were not enforced. When I come to renew the factory registration it is clear that the boiler or generator needs to be on the ground floor or in another shed. If I find there is a boiler on the 2nd or 3rd floor I will not renew the license. It is much stricter now.

“When I joined in 2013 it was different. The work capacity and work efficiency was not so high. But now so much has changed.

“When a worker calls me and says ‘Farzana I got my salary’ it gives me so much happiness. If there is a violation and the management corrects it, I know I have solved at least one problem.”



# Better Work Bangladesh

An innovative partnership between the ILO and the International Finance Corporation, Better Work Bangladesh (BWB) was launched in October 2013 as part of the ILO's Improving Working Conditions Programme in the RMG Sector.



Better Work Bangladesh is working to improve garment workers' lives by striving to secure safe, clean and equitable working environments. To do so, efforts are underway to build strong relations between managers and workers who, with Better Work support, can then take ownership and responsibility for continuously improving working conditions and eventually competitiveness at the factory.

To date, Better Work is working with 38 factories in Bangladesh which are supplying garments to 17 brands and retailers. A major benefit for RMG factories is that by participating in Better Work they are able to greatly reduce the duplication of buyer audits. Better workplace relations between management and staff can also not only lead to better working conditions and employee satisfaction but also to higher productivity.

Better Work Bangladesh is funded by Canada, France, Kingdom of Netherlands, State Secretariat for Economic Affairs, Switzerland (SECO), the United Kingdom and United States Department of Labor.

For more information please see <http://betterwork.org/>

# Supporting Rana Plaza victims and families

In the absence of any universal employment injury insurance scheme, dependents of the deceased or those injured by the Rana Plaza collapse faced an uncertain future. A considerable effort involving partners from Bangladesh and around the world has helped provide support to victims, their families and dependents for losses and needs arising from the accident.





### **Rehabilitation for survivors**

In the aftermath of the Rana Plaza collapse, ILO carried out an assessment of the needs of Rana Plaza victims. As a result, it was possible to develop a reintegration and rehabilitation programme that helped meet the needs of victims and to identify active partners able to provide such services.

In order to facilitate support, the Rana Plaza coordination cell was established in November 2013. It has helped promote better coordination among almost 30 different organizations resulting in a more efficient and effective delivery of rehabilitation services to over 3,000 recipients.

Amongst these recipients were 300 injured workers who with ILO support received counselling and livelihoods training in collaboration with NGOs Action Aid and BRAC through the support of Canada, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom as well as the European Union.

## Compensating the victims

A coordinated and systematic approach was required to provide income and health protection to the victims of Rana Plaza and their dependents. ILO has played a major role in this process undertaking a coordination role as well as providing technical expertise on the design and operation of a compensation scheme in line with ILO Convention No.121 concerning benefits in the case of employment injury.

Agreement to provide compensation was formalised through the Rana Plaza Arrangement signed in November 2013 between the Bangladesh Ministry of Labour,

leading buyers, employers' and workers' organizations as well as NGOs.

Despite the commitment by all parties to providing compensation, putting the plan into practice faced considerable challenges. These included logistical issues such as registering, assessing and paying victims and their dependents, the coordination of a scheme with stakeholders based both locally and around the world as well as the financial question of securing adequate funds to make compensation payments.

By the 30 September 2014 deadline more than 3,490 claims<sup>1</sup> had been received relating to over 5,000

injured workers and dependents of the deceased.

By April 2015 some US\$ 24.1 million had been donated towards compensation by brands, retailers as well as a variety of other donors. Awards in respect of almost all claims had been made as had partial payments on a pro rata basis relating to funds available.

Once payments were made vulnerability assessments of recipients have taken place in collaboration with the International Organization for Migration and civil society organizations to ensure that those who had received funds could take advantage of training or other support services available.

## Claims Received, Funds in Trust Fund

Compensation claims received

**3,490**

Amount of payment made in respect of each compensation award

**70%**

Funds donated for compensation

**US\$ 24.1 million**

Amount needed to fully pay each award

**US\$ 30 million**

## Employment Injury Insurance for Bangladesh

Following Rana Plaza an unprecedented effort took place to provide compensation to survivors and families of the dead. However it is not realistic or beneficial to repeat such a complex exercise whenever accidents occur. ILO is therefore working with the Government of Bangladesh to establish a Universal Employment Injury Insurance (EII) scheme for the RMG sector. This would benefit workers who receive compensation in the event of any future industrial accident. Meanwhile employers also benefit as an EII scheme would spread the risks arising from accidents across all RMG enterprises while boosting the industry's reputation. This in turn would make it more attractive to buyers.

1. Including claims processed by directly by Primark in respect of workers in the New Wave Bottoms factory.

## Adori's story



Photo: Sarah-Jane Saltmarsh

**Severely injured and traumatized in the Rana Plaza collapse, Adori could not face going back to work in a traditional factory. With the support of her family and business skills training and counselling from the ILO, Adori and her husband decided to start a home-based business making paper bags.**

“We started without any orders,” says Adori’s husband. “I copied a paper bag I got from a drugstore and went to the market to try and find a buyer. Hearing my wife’s story, people were really helpful. They showed us the process and supported us. We now make many types of bags and are getting orders of 5,000 bags and more.”

The ILO business training that Adori received helped the business to start and also to grow, as Adori recounts.

“I felt a lot more confident about starting a business after the training. I now have ten workers. I trained everyone. I learnt to try my best in every bag, to never sit idly or be content just because something is going right. I also learnt how to make other people productive, and fit part-time work into their lives.

“We put our name and number on all our bags. Last night we got a call and are meeting a potential

new buyer this morning who got our number from the bags. We have a lot of competitors, but our bags are good – they are stronger than most in the market because we use better quality paper and make the joins in the bags stronger. This means the bags break less often and customers like them because they can reuse them.

“When I see someone carrying a bag we have made, I feel so good. I go up to people and tell them that my business made them!”

Adori also benefitted from counselling provided by ILO to survivors.

“The ILO counselling really helped my wife and I saw lots of changes in her,” says her husband. “Before the counselling she was gloomy all the time, depressed, she did not talk much, but after the sessions she started talking about her experiences with me. We started sharing what they were doing in the sessions and her smile came back.”

# Improving labour rights

**Empowered, aware and organized, workers have a key workplace safety role to play. The need to strengthen labour rights was brought into sharp focus with the Rana Plaza collapse where large-scale loss of life may have been avoided had workers been better able to voice concerns over the safety of the building.**

ILO is providing technical assistance for trade union organizations to improve the capacity of workers to organize through a workers education programme organised in collaboration with the National Coordination Committee for Workers Education (NCCWE) and the IndustriALL Bangladesh Council (IBC).

The programme aims at creating an enabling environment for worker organizations and collective bargaining at factory level that will lead to workers participating in occupational safety and health as well as rights related matters. Recognising that the majority of garment workers are women, special emphasis is also being placed on training women trade union leaders and organizers on key labour rights.

Furthermore, initiatives carried out by ILO under the umbrella of its Ready Made Garment Sector programme are also helping workers and their representatives to exercise their rights and improve labour-management cooperation at the enterprise level.

Funded by the US Department of Labor, Norway and Denmark the projects address specific challenges faced by workers' and employers' organisations by building local capacity in relation to freedom of association and collective bargaining. In all, the capacity of over 2,500 workers' representatives, trade union organizers, mid-level managers and employers' organization members has been enhanced through various training events.

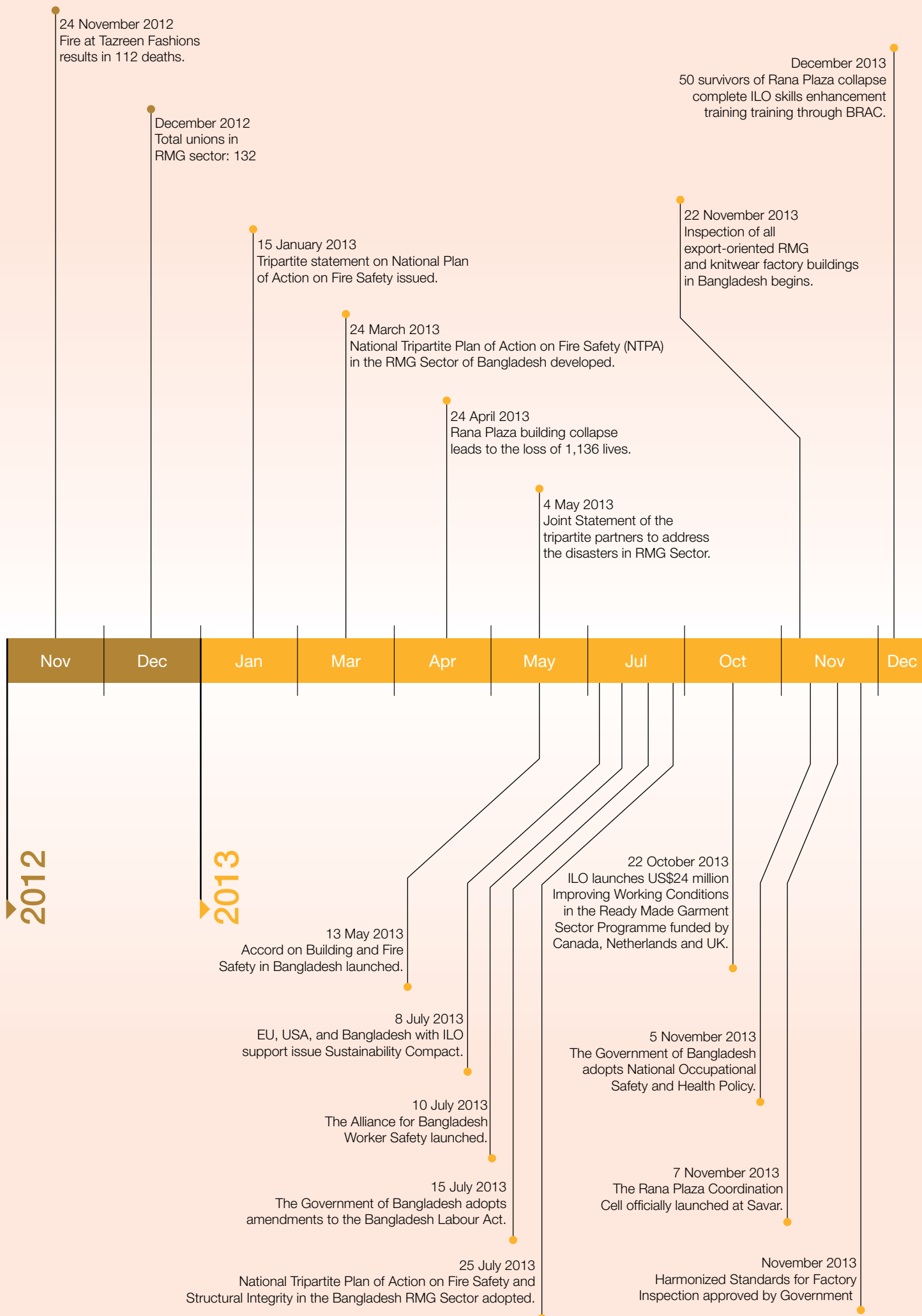
A process is ongoing to set up a dispute settlement and mediation system with the Department of Labour to help address anti-union discrimination and terminations. A pilot hotline/telephone service has been launched to address labour disputes and grievance-related issues. Meanwhile an online registration process and electronic database established within the Department of Labour is helping facilitate trade union registration and transparency.

In addition, representatives of government, employers and workers organizations as well as Industrial Relations Institutes (IRI) have been trained on the use of Interest Based Negotiation (IBN) techniques to help develop mutual trust and cooperation. The physical infrastructure of the IRIs is also being rehabilitated and their capacity built so they can play a more effective role in enhancing labour relations across all industrial sectors.

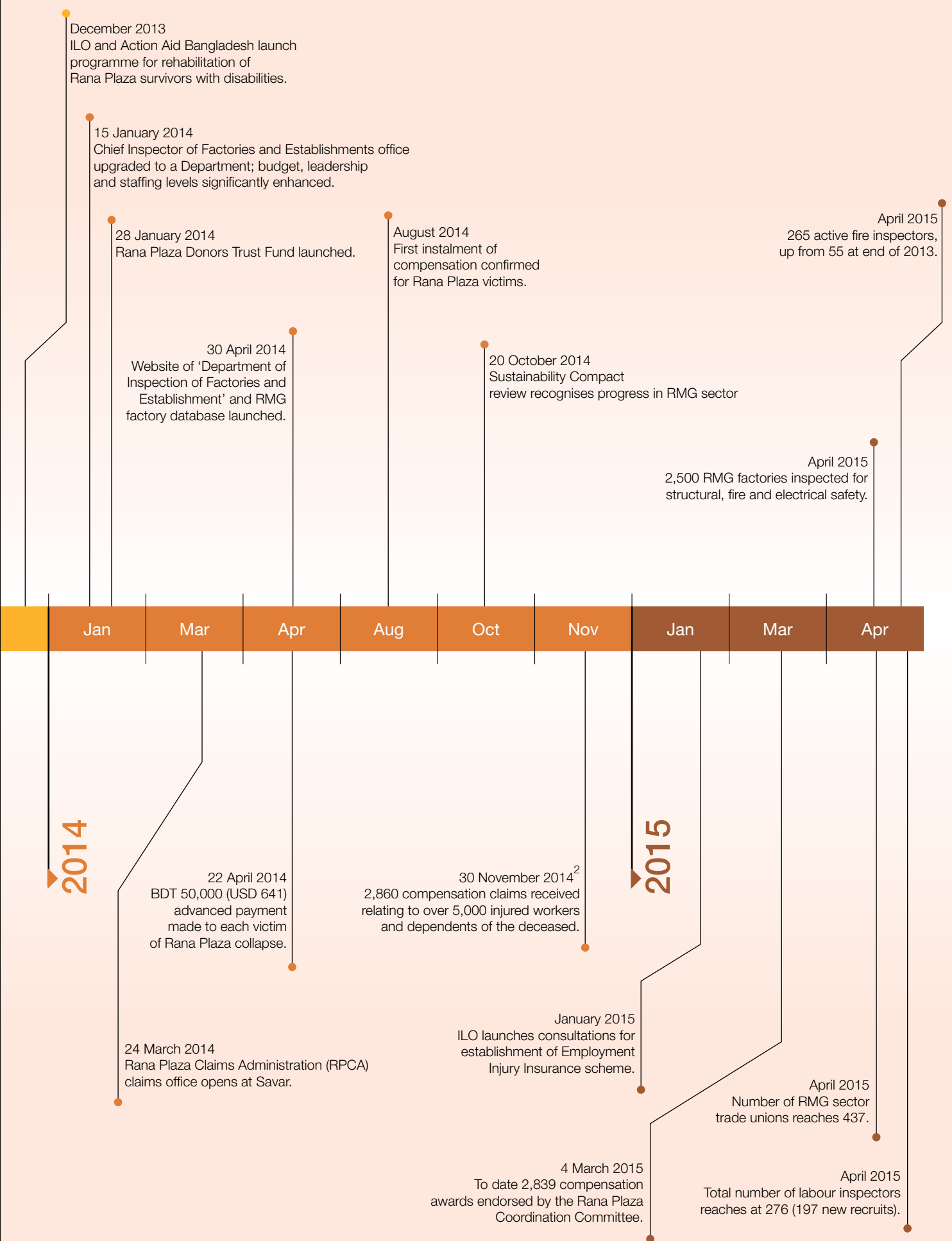


*“The government should ensure that workers can organize without fear. Employers need to see workers as partners in the production process. Brands sourcing from Bangladesh should follow ethical buying practices and pay fair prices. Meanwhile, workers themselves need to ensure a constructive and responsible trade union practice and prove that unions are not a problem but are part of the solution. Things are moving in a positive direction. But we need to speed it up and we need to bring momentum to the whole process.”*

**Mr. Roy Ramesh Chandra, Secretary General,  
IndustriALL Bangladesh**







2. Figure excludes claims by approximately 630 New Wave Bottom workers, handled and paid directly by Primark.

## Naseer's story



Photo: Sarah-Jane Saltmarsh

**27-year-old Naseer owns the New Life garment factory along with his friend Jahangir. Both are survivors of the Rana Plaza collapse. The six women that they now employ are also all survivors.**

*“After the collapse, I decided to open my own factory, to give myself and other survivors jobs. I did not think about whether or not it would succeed. I purchased two secondhand machines costing BDT 15,000 each and rented a space. A friend offered me my first batch of work - to make tights. I worked hard and called in someone else to help me, and in the space I had just rented, using the machines I had just bought, we made our first batch. It was 100 pairs as a sample at first, then they said they were good, so we were asked to make 1,000.”*

One of the most difficult obstacles for survivors to overcome after the collapse were the non-visible injuries and ongoing trauma. Many suffered from short-term memory loss, were scared of multi-storied buildings and got panicked easily. Naseer wanted to start a factory that would be an example, one that not only employed other survivors, but that will grow big enough to employ them all, would not rise above one storey and did not chase strict production targets.

Naseer and Jahangir, after attending ILO-supported counselling and business skills sessions, still did not want to go back and work in traditional factories,

but they did feel confident enough to start their own business.

“I knew that I had to do something different because with my injured hand I would not be able to meet normal production targets again. I hired women because I think that children need their mothers when they are young, so I wanted them to be able to see them, and not be separated for the whole day. Where our small factory is now, it is close to schools and houses and we have flexible hours.

“I still regularly attend the self-help counselling groups. When I did not get work after the collapse, I started to get really catastrophic thoughts in my mind. I was thinking negatively and getting depressed. It was good to get together with other people. I really enjoyed the theatre counselling. It was good discussing the collapse with other people in a comfortable space. You can meet up with people and talk anywhere but unless it is in a setting like that, normally issues do not come out, you don't just talk about them anywhere, anytime. We discussed lots of issues around self-development which helped me to start this business.”



[www.ilo.org/dhaka](http://www.ilo.org/dhaka)

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ILO's activities to improve working conditions in the Ready Made Garment Sector are supported by



Workers' rights and fire safety initiatives carried out by ILO are supported by

