

**AIBS Seminar on**  
**RMG industries of Bangladesh: Trade, Industrial Relations and Workers' Rights**  
**Venue:** CIRDAP International Conference Center (CICC), Dhaka  
**Date:** Sunday, July 31, 2016

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| Registration  |  | 2.30 – 3.00 PM |
| Welcome, Introduction, and Overview                     | Professor Dr. Golam M. Mathbor<br>President, American Institute of Bangladesh Studies (AIBS)   | 3.00 – 3.10 PM |
| Paper 1   | <b>Opportunities and Limitations of the Accord/Alliance: Need for a Worker Centric Model</b><br><br>Dr. Chaumtoli Huq, Adjunct Clinical Professor of Law at Brooklyn Law School, New York; and Founder/Editor of Law@theMargins ( <a href="http://www.lawatthemargins.com">www.lawatthemargins.com</a> ) | 3.10 – 3.35 PM |
| Paper 2   | <b>Social Safety nets for Disaster Survivors: the Case of Bangladesh RMG Industry</b><br><br>Professor Dr. Md. Ismail Hossain<br>Department of Social Work<br>Shahjalal University of Science and Technology, Sylhet, Bangladesh   | 3.35 – 4.00 PM |
| Paper 3   | <b>Bangladesh's Garment Workers' Representative Participation: Where Do We Stand?</b><br><br>Dr. Jakir Hossain, University of Rajshahi, Rajshahi, Bangladesh   | 4.00 – 4.25 PM |
| Question & Answer Session                               | The floor will be open for questions to the paper presenters and for open discussion   | 4.25 – 5.25 PM |
| Speech of the Chief Guest                               | <b>Mr. Md. Mujibul Haque</b><br>Honorable State Minister<br>Ministry of Labour and Employment  | 5.25 – 5.50 PM |
| Speech of the Special Guest<br>*Subject to Confirmation | <b>Mr. Srinivas B. Reddy*</b><br>Country Director,<br>International Labor Organization (ILO)   |                |
| Concluding Remarks<br>Followed by Reception             | Professor Dr. Golam M. Mathbor<br>President, American Institute of Bangladesh Studies (AIBS)   | 5.50 – 6.00 PM |

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**Rationale and Abstracts:**

Bangladesh has been a case in point for its flourishing garment industry over the decades. However, problem still remain with regard to workers' safety standards, gross violation of industrial workers' rights and privileges, as well as the factory owners failure to comply with the required safety standards set forth by the International Labor Organization (ILO). This seminar will take a look at the Post Rana Plaza intervention in order to prevent future loss of life, the violation of basic human rights of the workers, and to ensure effective social safety nets are created for disaster survivors. The seminar will also address the issue of Bangladesh's Garment workers representative participation to provide direction for the future growth and stability of the RMG sector in Bangladesh.

**Paper 1: Opportunities and Limitations of the Accord/Alliance: Need for a Worker Centric Model**

Dr. Chaumtoli Huq, Adjunct Clinical Professor of Law at Brooklyn Law School, New York and founder/Editor of an innovative online platform focused on law and social justice called Law@theMargins ([www.lawatthemargins.com](http://www.lawatthemargins.com)).

**Abstract**

After Rana Plaza, the Accord and the Alliance emerged as two factory safety inspection programs with the goal of preventing another workplace tragedy. While these agreements were historic in the sense that there had not been a unified effort by global brands to address safety issues, they were not a radical departure from the existing framework of corporate social responsibility programs by global brands. While perhaps the Accord stands out as a new development in that it was a binding agreement between global brands, unions and NGOs, it is limited by its sole focus on factory inspections. The Accord and Alliance also do not cover all the factories that produce garments in Bangladesh. Three years later, we still read of stories of factory fires, unsafe conditions, and we have not seen any material changes in the lives of workers in terms of wages, and ability to self-organize to form trade unions. This presentation will focus on the opportunities and limitations of these programs, which essentially rely on private market approaches to address workplace safety and labor rights issues, in the context of

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neoliberal policies that seek minimal regulation by state actors and other non-binding accountability measures. It will argue that without a labor rights focus to these programs and greater accountability measures their impact will be limited. However, within the five year expiry period of the programs, there are opportunities to redirect the focus of these programs towards building the capacity of workers to demand better working conditions.

**Paper 2: Social Safety Nets for Disaster Survivors: the Case of Bangladesh RMG Industry**

Dr. Md. Ismail Hossain, Professor, Department of Social Work, Shahjalal University of Science & Technology (SUST), Sylhet, Bangladesh

**Abstract**

Frequent industrial accidents cause innumerable deaths and physical disability. Survivors lead a very inhuman life for lack of subsistence, treatment and other familial needs. Corporate partners are supposed to carry out responsible roles for protection of the physically challenged and mentally disabled workers. Based on empirical evidence from Rana Plaza survivors, this paper explores the problems faced by the survivors, roles of the state and corporate partners, and seeks to find out the array of social work practice for protection of disaster survivors. Data has been collected from Rana Plaza survivors using four different kinds of methods-document reviews, observation, in-depth interviews, and focus group discussions. This study explores the fact that industrial disasters force workers into more vulnerable situations than they were exposed to in the past. Unbearable trauma, inability to incur the cost for treatment and subsistence forces many of them to commit suicide. The victims and their families require long-term support for subsistence. Concurrently, counseling and advocacy services are inevitable for the physically challenged, mentally disrupted and traumatized workers. Therefore, a comprehensive social safety net program is needed to protect survivors from further slipping into harm's way.

**Paper 3: Bangladesh's Garment Workers' Representative Participation: Where Do We Stand?**

Dr. Jakir Hossain, Professor, Institute of Bangladesh Studies (IBS), University of Rajshahi, Rajshahi, Bangladesh

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**Abstract**

Despite exponential growth and increased profits in Bangladesh's garment sector, the benefits are not shared equitably amongst the workforce. The continued agitation by Bangladesh's RMG workers against the violation of their rights indicates that the sector still under-values its workforce, and lacks the regulatory frames, institutions and practices needed for a harmonious industrial and labor relation. Drawing lessons from RMG workers' representative participation mechanisms and practices, this presentation argues that the way Bangladesh's RMG workers' representative participation mechanisms is structured, and the subsequent actions taken by the employers and the government do not address the workers' grievances and concerns. The employers only seek to maintain stability in their workplace in order to continue production without addressing the real concerns of the employees. The strategy used to resolve disputes by the employers is typically used to coerce and suppress workers' demands which lead to more violence such as strikes, protests, and riots. The consequences are unfair and unjust not only to workers but also prevent industrial peace. This presentation will shed light on how workers' representative participation methods can be utilized in order to ensure peace and stability in the RMG Industry.

**Distinguished Speakers:**



**Dr. Chaumtoli Huq** is an Adjunct Clinical Professor of Law at Brooklyn Law School and founder/Editor of an innovative online platform focused on law and social justice called Law@theMargins ([www.lawatthemargins.com](http://www.lawatthemargins.com)). She has received her B.A degree in Political Science and Government from Columbia University, and a J.D (Juris Doctorate) degree from Northeastern University specializing in Labor and Employment Law. Her expertise lies in labor and employment, immigration and immigrant rights. From 2014 to 2015, she was a Senior Research Fellow with the American Institute for Bangladesh Studies (AIBS) where she researched the labor conditions of garment workers after the tragic Rana Plaza building collapse. She produced a 5 minute documentary based on her work called Sramik Awaaz: Workers Voices. Huq has taught courses in legal

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practice, immigrant rights, employment law, and legal issues facing Asian-Americans at BMCC, New York Law School, City College/CUNY and Rutgers University. She has devoted her professional career to the public interest, focusing on immigrant workers, persons with criminal records, survivors of domestic violence and low-income workers. Along with holding leadership roles at Legal Services of NYC and MFY Legal Services, she also served as Director of the first South Asian Workers' Rights Project at the Asian American Legal Defense and Education Fund, and as the first staff attorney to the New York Taxi Workers Alliance, a multi-ethnic, immigrant and worker led labor organization. Huq is a contributor to the anthology *Voices of Resistance: Muslim Women on War, Faith and Sexuality* (Ed. Sarah Husain; Seal Press 2006), co-author of "Laying the Groundwork for Post 9-11 Alliances: Reflections Ten Years Later on Desis and Organizing" (Asian American Literary Review, Volume 2, Issue 1.5, Fall 2011) and has authored Op-Eds in Al Jazeera, Huffpost and Daily Star, the largest English daily in Bangladesh.



**Md. Ismail Hossain** is a professor of social work at Shahjalal University of Science & Technology, Bangladesh. After obtaining BSS and MSS in Social Welfare from Institute of Social Welfare and Research, University of Dhaka, he joined as a faculty in the department of Social Work in this university. He also achieved master degree in women and gender studies with EU funded Erasmus Mundus Scholarships. Dr. Hossain received PhD in Labor Studies for the dissertation on, "Working Conditions and Rights of Women Workers in Global Manufacturing: The Case of Readymade Garment Industry in Bangladesh" from University of Milan, Italy. Dr. Hossain was an 'International Visiting Scholar' at Monmouth University from September 2012 to December 2012. He has been deeply engaged of conducting research on labor and social justice issues for the last two decades. He has published numerous articles in various national and international journals and chapters in edited volume. He is the co-author of a book, **Social Justice in the Globalization of Production: Labour, Gender, and the Environment Nexus (2016)** which has been published by Palgrave Macmillan. He offered a number courses focusing on his research interest such as 'Gender Issues and Social Work Practice', 'Social welfare Policy and Services in Bangladesh', 'Employment Relations and Labour Welfare' and so on. He has presented a number of papers in the international conferences

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and workshops both in home and abroad. Currently, Dr. Hossain is engaged in exploring the collective responsibility for ensuring labour justice at global manufacturing sites with particular focus of Bangladesh RMG industry.



**Dr. Jakir Hossain** is a Professor at the Institute of Bangladesh Studies, University of Rajshahi. He received Ph.D. from the School of International Studies, University of Trento, Italy. Prior, he was educated in the London South Bank University, London School of Economics and Political Science, and Carleton University in Development Studies, Social Policy and Planning in Developing Countries, and Trade Policy and Commercial Diplomacy respectively. He had been a Visiting Fellow at the School of Industrial and Labor Relations, Cornell University, and a post-doctoral teaching fellow at the Center for Global Workers' Rights, School of Labor and Employment Relations, Pennsylvania State University. He had taught Bangladesh Development Perspectives, Research Frame and Methodology Scale, Participatory Research Methods, Socioeconomic Studies of Bangladesh at the Institute of Bangladesh Studies, University of Rajshahi and at the Institute of Business Administration, University of Dhaka. He had contributed to research programs on Vulnerability of Bangladesh Workers at the Development Synergy Institute, and on Trade Policy Analysis, Bangladesh Public Policy Watch, and Listening to People Living in Poverty at the Unnayan Onneshan, Bangladesh. He earlier worked as Research Associate at the Centre for Policy Dialogue, Bangladesh and was involved in research programs on Trade Policy and Multilateral Trading System, Population and Sustainable Development, 's and Independent Review of Bangladesh Development. He has written articles, policy papers, and briefs on labor rights, decent work, social dialogue, multilateral trading regime, poverty and injustice, skill formation and learning, and education and development. He had been a keynote speaker in different national and regional seminars in Bangladesh as well as in international conferences in USA, Canada, Italy, Germany, India, Pakistan, Indonesia, Thailand and Hong Kong. His areas of interest include International Labor Standards, Decent Work, Occupational Safety and Health, Participation and Representation, Human Security, Human Rights, Globalization, Governance, Multilateral Trading Regime, and Development Cooperation.