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# Newsletter

## December 2022

### Editorial



Aminur Rashid-Repon Chowdhury  
Member Secretary-BSPAN

Social protection is an important sector in Bangladesh and is embedded in Article 15 (d) of the country's National Constitution (1972). It is also the cornerstone of the National Social Security Strategy (NSSS).

It is the responsibility of the government to provide social protection to the sections of the society. Currently, Bangladesh has 115 disparate social protection programmes under 39 ministries

The government has already implemented the National Social Security Strategy (NSSS) Action Plan 2016-21 and has recently started the implementation of the NSSS Action Plan 2021-26. BSPAN urged government to engage all the stakeholders to implement the ministry-wise action plan of NSSS-Phase-2.

Furthermore, recently government has taken an initiative to pass the draft Universal Pension Management Bill. Bangladesh Social Protection Advocacy Network (BSPAN) appreciates such initiative. All working citizens between the age of 18 and 50 will be entitled to receive the pension benefit. Bangladeshi's working abroad will also be able to take part in it. We hope that through this act the scope of social security in Bangladesh would expand for the vulnerable people in the informal sector.

We are calling to the government to organize necessary social dialogue with relevant stakeholders to avoid existing weakness at this draft bill before place it to the national parliament for approval and inclusion of a representative of BSPAN and a representative from the trade unions in Bangladesh at the Governing Board of the upcoming Universal Pension Management Bill.

### Advance Training on Social Protection

BSPAN organized an Advance Training on Social Protection at ALOK Training Center, Mirpur, Dhaka in collaboration with Gonoshasthaya Kendra. Member Secretary of BSPAN Mr. Repon Chowdhury inaugurated the training by his welcome speech while BSPAN Steering Committee President Dr. Manzur Kadir Ahmed presided over the training with his closing remarks. Coordinator of BSPAN Mr. Asad Uddin moderated the training.



A total of 23 participants attended at the training where 8 is female and 15 is male and 8 is youth. This was a two-days long training with six (06) technical sessions including group works.

#### Technical Sessions :

**National Social Security Strategy (NSSS-Phase-II) :** Mehrin Karim, Research officer, Social Protection Policy Support (SPPS), UNDP conducted this session. She discussed on next 5 years projection for social security budget and social protection in SDG etc.

**Employment Injury Scheme :** Ms. Noushin Shah, National Programme Coordinator, ILO Bangladesh conducted this session. She briefly discussed on bridging

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### Just Transition and Social Protection for Climate Adaptation in Bangladesh

Social protection initiatives are as much at risk from climate change as other development approaches. They are unlikely to succeed in reducing poverty if they do not consider both the short and long-term shocks and stresses associated with climate change. The concept of 'adaptive social protection' involves examining opportunities that approaches to social protection provide for adaptation, and for developing climate-resilient social protection programmes.

According to the Global Climate Risk Index (CRI) of 2021, Bangladesh is still the seventh most climate vulnerable country in the world. In terms of economic losses,

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## Training on Social Media for BSPAN Members

At present, social media and information technology are being considered as powerful media to explore knowledge and upgradation of the organizations. Considering these aspects, to build the capacity of BSPAN Members on social protection and upgradation of social media to advocacy and knowledge development for social protection in Bangladesh, BSPAN Organized a social media training for its member organization on 13 September 2022 in collaboration with WSM.

The specific objectives of the training were-

- To upgrade the basic concepts of social protection;
- To introduce on the maintenance of social media for individual and organizations;
- To update on digital communication, cyber security and basic on social media;
- To increase the capacities of the participants on the need to maintain social media of their respective organizations as well as BSPAN.



A total of 20 participants attended at the training from member organizations. Among the participants 7 were female and 12 were youths.

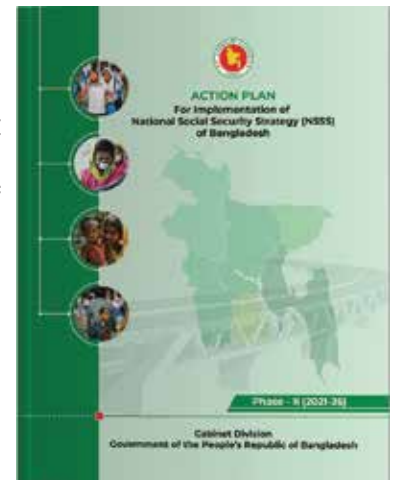
It was day long training with inauguration, technical session and closing of the training. The technical session covered seven (07) topics on Effective communication, Digital Communication, Email Etiquette, facebook and social media, website and other topics including group work and future action plan.

## Dissemination Workshop on NSSS Action Plan, Phase - II

The National social security strategy (NSSS) has been formulated to provide a framework of lifecycle-based social security. The NSSS recommends reforming the designs and delivery system of the existing programmes in two phases of five years each, 2016 – 2021 and 2021- 2025. With the formulation and completion of the first phase of the NSSS Action plan (2016-21) now the country is already in its implementation phase of the NSSS action plan, phase -II(2021-26) which has been formulated to accelerate the process of the transformation.

A dissemination workshop on NSSS Action plan, phase II(2021-26) and baseline assessment and way forward has organized on 06-13 September 2022 with an aim to disseminate the newly formulated NSSS Action plan phase-II

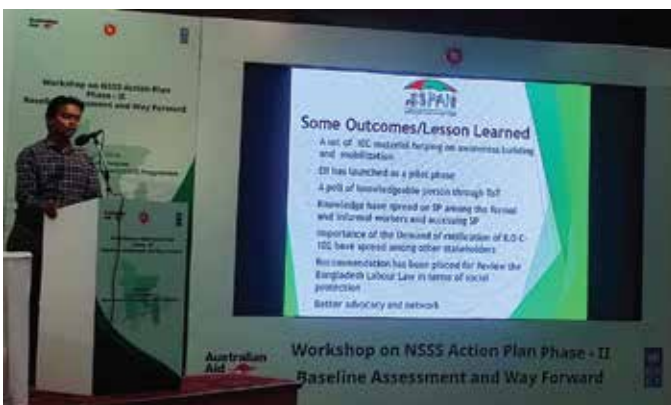
(2021-26) within the social protection implementing ministries, departments, and relevant agencies along with the baseline assessment of the Action Plan. Through the workshop, it is expected that a baseline assessment of the NSSS Action plan, phase-II will be developed that will help evaluate the implementation status and progress of the action plan.



13 Technical session has been conducted for consecutive four days where the secretary, coordination and Reforms and the member (secretary), General Economics Division (GED) was the chairperson respectively.

Implementing ministries/divisions – a good number of academics and institution, social protection practitioners, research organisations, NGO delegates, CSOs participated in this baseline exercise.

BSPAN participated at the workshop as NGO and shared its interventions, achievements and future scope of collaboration.





## Social Protection— A Nexus Towards Growth



The poverty rate in the country came down to 20.5 percent and the extreme poverty rate to 10.5 percent in pre-COVID-19 time following the implementation of the government's planned policy. Although our progress halted for a while like other countries in the world due to pandemic, Bangladesh was able to return to

the pace of development in a few days, thanks to the swift and bold steps of the government. Special emphasis was placed in the current budget on programs to strengthen health, investment, production, employment, human resource development, poverty alleviation, and the social safety-net to overcome the crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, maintain the country's development pace, and protect the lives and livelihoods of the general public. On the one hand, the government has been pursuing multi-faceted development initiatives aimed at transforming the economy's structure; the scope of the social safety net has been continually enlarged to reduce poverty and inequality for inclusive growth.



Source: Ministry of Finance

Social Protection Programs remain central to Bangladesh's sustainable development policy and are progressively benefitting the poorer households. Social protection is an important sector in Bangladesh and is embedded in Article 15 (d) of the country's Constitution. It is also the cornerstone of the National Social Security Strategy (2015), and its additional Action Plan (2018), which both cite plans to introduce a National Social Insurance Scheme covering sickness, maternity pay and protection, old age pensions, workplace accidents and unemployment benefits for workers in the formal economy.

Already, 29 percent of households have been covered by social safety-net programmes, and budget allocations have increased almost eight-fold compared to the allocation made in the budget for FY2008-2009. The government has already implemented the National Social Security Strategy (NSSS) Action Plan 2016-21 under the NSSS 2015 and has recently started the implementation of the NSSS Action Plan 2021-26. Currently, Bangladesh has 115 disparate social protection programmes under 39 ministries, primarily centered around food distribution and cash transfers. The SP initiatives adopted over the years have covered a wide range of beneficiaries and have positively impacted their lives. Bangladesh was also quick to jump with the stimulus packages when the country faced the biggest challenge of Covid 19 to cushion the shock. The government's budget has been seen to be on an increasing trend which now amounts to 2.55% of GDP and 16.75% of the total Budget in FY 22-23. Over the last decades, Bangladesh

expanded its coverage of social protection programs that now reach three in every 10 households in the country.

During the past two years, three programmes under the Department of Social Services have expanded coverage and introduced an online self-registration system to 112 poverty-stricken upazilas in 2020-21 and to 150 upazilas in 2021-22. These three programmes are Allowances for the Widow, Deserted and Destitute Women, Allowances for the Financially Insolvent Disabled and Old Age Allowance. The allowance for insolvent disabled has also been increased from Tk 750 to Tk 850. The Old Age Allowance covers 5.7 million beneficiaries now across rural and urban areas, which includes about 50 percent of the elderly population of the country. The number increased rapidly from 4.4 million in 2018. The Allowances for Widow, Deserted and Destitute Women currently benefit 2.47 million women, while about one million persons receive disability allowances.

However, there are some lags when it comes to targeting the selection of beneficiaries. Social protection schemes may be improved if a quality national household database is used. Currently, the beneficiary selection for social safety net programmes is debatable. A number of studies conducted at both local and international levels show that a significant number of deserving people have no access to the social security programmes. To address the situation, the government has undertaken a project to develop a comprehensive database of all households (known as the National Household Database-NHD) and a selection method based on 'Proxy Means Test (PMT)' model to improve the selection of the poor and thereby reduce the high level of exclusion and inclusion errors. To boost the quality and efficiency of service delivery, Government to Person (G2P) and mobile financial services should be scaled up. Recently most allowance like old age allowance, maternity and disabled allowance has been transferred via MFS which helped in proper targeting. This also needs to be paired with increased allocations for staffing, capacity-building training including digital literacy, and improved equipment, which will facilitate enhanced implementation of programs at the local level.

The recent announcement by the government to introduce a universal pension scheme (UPS) in Bangladesh from the 2022-23 fiscal year is a welcome and timely move. The ruling party committed to the scheme during the 2008 general elections, and it has been planning to introduce it since FY2017-18. The aspiration to provide support to the country's senior citizens is featured prominently in various government documents. All working citizens between the ages of 18 and 50 will be entitled to receive the pension benefit. Bangladeshis working abroad will also be able to take part in it. However, employees of government and autonomous organizations will be considered later as they are currently covered by the government pension scheme. All citizens between the ages of 18 and 50 can open a pension account based on the information provided in their national identity cards. Initially it would be optional. The government has plans to make it compulsory later.

The government needs to be applauded for the effort in making social protection a right and not a charity. It should be seen as an investment which will aid the country to progress further and help in the reduction of poverty.

**Mehryn Karim**

is working as a Research Officer in UNDP

# National Dialogue on Policy, Legislative and Institutional Reform of Social Protection in Bangladesh



Bangladesh Social Protection Advocacy Network (BSPAN) with the support of WSM organized a National Dialogue on Legislative and Institutional Management of Social Protection in Bangladesh held on 20th August, 2022 at NGO Forum for Public Health Conference Hall in Dhaka.

The speakers at the national Dialogue urge the government to include a worker's representative at Draft National Pension Authority Act, 2022 and etiquette, reeducation, relevance, financial stability and investing in human rights at social protection programs.

Dr. S.M Morshed, Vice chair of OSHE foundation presented the key-note paper. He focused on the emergence of social protection in Bangladesh, budgetary allocation, existing social protection schemes in Bangladesh labour Law etc.

He placed several recommendations including-

- Implement Employment Injury Insurance following ILS

- Review the compensation of package for workplaces related death and injury
- Ratification of ILO Convention 102
- Formation of contributory social protection fund
- Social Project Schemes for Working people by the Ministry of Labour and Employment.

In Panel discussion SM Anamul Haque, Director, DoL, Nizam Uddin Al Hossaini, Former DG of Department of Women Affairs, Saad Gilani, Chief Technical Advisor (CTA) of ILO, Shakil Akther Chowdhury, Member Secretary of NCCWE expressed their views and opinions.

In open discussion the participants exchange their opinion and Suggestions including- Enforce Employment Injury Insurance, Mobilize Labour Welfare Foundation Fund, more and more social dialogue etc. ■

## Advance Training on Social Protection

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solution for social security in case of employment injury, challenges and way forward etc.

**Social Protection in Bangladesh- Current status, challenges and opportunities** : Dr. S M Morshed , Social protection analyst conducted the session. He emphasized on the challenges and limitations of social protection etc. Social Protection and Sustainable Developments Goals.

Md. Monirul Islam, Joint Secretary (SDG), Prime Minister office conducted a session with focusing the concept of SDGs, initiatives by GOB in SDGs implementation etc.

Health Care Scheme for RMG Workers in Bangladesh GK initiated "Health Care Service Programme for the Garments and Textile **Workers of Bangladesh**" : Mr. Rezaul Haque, Director-GK conducted this session.

Social Accountability and Transparency in Social Protection : Social accountability is increasingly being incorporated as a key set of processes to improve development outcomes, especially in the countries of the Global South. Manuser Jonno Foundation shared their tools and stories etc.

International Labour Standards on Social Protection: Md. Alam Hossain, Director, OSHE Foundation explained the Conventions and Recommendations which make up the ILO's standards framework on social security.

Dr. Md. Moktar Hossain, Deputy Secretary, Director (Social Safety Net), Department of Social Services delivered closing remarks. In his closing address, he appreciated the efforts of the participants from BSPAN in assisting to implement very useful, time-be-fitting and much relevant training. He requested the participants to spread the learning of the training to the fellow workers.



## The Annual General Meeting (AGM) of BSPAN

The Annual General Meeting (AGM) of Bangladesh Social Protection Advocacy Network (BSPAN) held at Gonoshasthaya Nagar Hospital, Dhaka on 02 July 2022. 30 participants from network member organizations participated at the AGM. Dr. Manzur Kadir Ahmed, Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of Gonoshasthaya Kendra presided over the meeting while Mr. Repon Chowdhury, Executive Director of OSHE moderated it.

BSPAN implemented activities and outcomes has been presented at the AGM. The planned activities of 2022 have been presented and future action plans have also discussed.

The Draft Terms of References (Policy Guide) of BSPAN has been presented at the AGM and the participants shared their opinions and then finalized the ToR and has been adopted at the AGM.

An 11 members Steering Committee of the network has been



formed by the members for 2 years with Dr. Manzur Kadir Ahmed of GK as Chair and and Mr. Repon Chodhury of OSHE foundation as Member Secretary. OSHE foundation has selected as secretariat of the network for 2 years (2022-2024).

This AGM is a milestone for BSPAN to move forward and strengthen the network. ■

## Launch of Employment Injury Schemes



Bangladesh rolled out the pilot project of the country's first employment injury scheme for workers.

The ILO, in collaboration with the Ministry of Labour and

Employment, launched the pilot of the Employment Injury Scheme (EIS) Project on 21 June 2022. As a result, workers in the export-oriented readymade garment sector will get enhanced social security through income protection.

The launch of the Employment Injury Protection scheme for garment workers in Bangladesh is an important and historic step in strengthening accident protection in the country.

Since 2013, the ILO and German development agency GIZ have been working with Bangladesh and industry partners for ensuring workers' social and financial security. As a continuation of the process, the government has decided to introduce a periodic payment scheme for occupational injuries, disabilities and deaths in the garment industry. The EIS pilot can rightly be considered the peak of the reform process. ■

## BSPAN Coordination Meeting

Coordination Meeting of Bangladesh Social Protection Advocacy Network held on 07 June 2022 at OSHE Conference Hall. Chief Executive Officer of Gonoshasthaya Kendra, Dr. Manjur Kadir Ahmed Presided over the meeting.

Asad Uddin, Coordinator of BSPAN presented the implemented activities of 2021 and action plans for 2022-2026.

In draft National Pension Authority Act-2022, there is no workers representation. BSPAN should advocate in this issue and submit a letter to the authority in this regard.

Bruno Deceikelier of WSM conducted a short session on capacity strengthening of BSPAN. In his session, participants analyzed the weakness of BSPAN and gave suggestions to move forward. They choose two priority issues including Project management and Network Building.



The meeting also decided that Repon Chowdhury will represent BSPAN at INSPIR Asia level. The AGM of BSPAN will be held on 02 July 2022 at Gonoshasthaya Nagar Hospital, Dhanmondi, Dhaka, decided at the meeting.

## 7th AROSP Biennial Conference in Phnompenh, Cambodia



The 7th AROSP biennial meeting was organized in 7-8 November 2022 in Cambodia to finalise and launch the AROSP working paper; launch the AROSP strategy for next 5 years 2022-2026; to discuss the AROSP 2022 work plan including regional context analysis regarding agri-food sector.

There are 59 participants (24 men, 35 women) including 48 physical participants (25 women) and 11 online participants (10 women) with 42 participants from 35 local organizations in 13 Asian countries, and 17 participants from 11 regional and international organizations and networks.

### AROSP Working Paper

The AROSP working paper drafted in 2019 was firstly reviewed in the virtual AROSP meeting in June 2022 then circulated among AROSP for further input. On the 7th Nov 2022, AROSP reviewed all the inputs and comments and agreed on the Final Working Paper, which has six main contents.

The AROSP 5-year strategy (2022-2026) drafted by the AROSP coordination team based on a SWOC analysis in the AROSP

meeting in June 2022 was reviewed again and shared on the 8th Nov meeting. The AROSP strategy focuses on five core areas including 1) Research Development & Knowledge Management; 2) Capacity Building; 3) Advocacy and Campaign; 4) Change Practices; and 5) Networking, Partnership and Collaboration.

### AROSP 2022 Action Plan

One activity at regional level that involves AROSP members in 10 countries in South Asia and Southeast Asia, is the research on maternity protection in the region, which aims to provide an overall picture of social protection related vulnerabilities of women in the informal economy, especially of women in the agri-food sector. Two sub-regional research teams of Southeast Asia and South Asia physically met with some team members virtually participating to discuss and finalise the research methodology.

## Just Transition

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Bangladesh is badly affected by extreme weather events- like climatic, hydrological, meteorological and geological disaster resulting unimaginable adverse impacts on workplace, livelihoods and long-term health of a larger portion population of workforce. Due to the impacts on working conditions and occupational safety and health, Bangladesh loses \$26 billion labour productivity annually for intense heat stress, work displacement and migration due to income reduction, job losses and uninhabitable environment.

Global processes and crises are changing and deepening the risks for the poor and vulnerable people in rural areas. As we understand more about the impacts of climate change, adapting to these impacts has grown from a minor environmental concern to a major challenge for human development, and a crucial element in eradicating poverty and achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

While social protection aims to build resilience to climate-related disasters, insufficient attention has been played in the social protection sphere to the long-term risks posed by climate change. Social protection is an important fiscal policy instrument that not only helps smoothen consumption and reduce poverty and inequalities, but also spurs growth via raising the aggregate demand.

Since the independence, Bangladesh's social protection, a key policy instrument in the country, has had a history of innovation evolved around crises. The country now spends about three percent of the GDP on social protection programmes covering around 30 percent of its citizens. To learn about the programme and mechanism– it requires adequate training.

Bangladesh Government is budgeting a noteworthy amount for social protection, but all benefits should be in an umbrella and in universal approach. All we must come to a common voice and have strong skills and idea on Social Protection adaptation. And Just Transition strategies can be first forged by labour unions and environmental justice groups, particularly those rooted in low-income communities of color exploited both by industrial pollution, racism and economic oppression.

THE DAILY JUGANTOR  
যুগান্তর

বিএসপিএএনের বার্ষিক সাধারণ সভা অনুষ্ঠিত

যুগান্তর প্রতিবেদন

০৫ জুলাই ২০২২



বাংলাদেশ সোশ্যাল প্রোটেকশন অ্যাডভোকেসি নেটওয়ার্কের (বিএসপিএএন) বার্ষিক সাধারণ সভা-২০২২ গত ২ জুলাই রাজধানীর গণস্বাস্থ্য নগর হাসপাতালের সম্মেলন কক্ষে অনুষ্ঠিত হয়।

বিএসপিএএন'র সদস্য সংগঠনের ৩০ জন প্রতিনিধি সাধারণ সভায় অংশগ্রহণ করেন।

গণস্বাস্থ্য কেন্দ্রের প্রধান নির্বাহী কর্মকর্তা ডা. মনজুর কাদির আহমেদের সভাপতিত্বে এবং ওশি ফাউন্ডেশনের নির্বাহী পরিচালক রিপন চৌধুরীর সঞ্চালনায় অনুষ্ঠিত এ বার্ষিক সাধারণ সভায় বিগত কার্যক্রম এবং অর্জন তুলে ধরেন নেটওয়ার্ক এর কোঅর্ডিনেটর আসাদ উদ্দিন।

সভায় সব সদস্যের আলোচনা ও মতামতের ভিত্তিতে নেটওয়ার্ক এর নীতিমালা অনুমোদিত হয়।

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Bangladesh Post

CITY

## BSPAN holds annual meeting

By Staff Correspondent

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শেয়ার বিজ  
সুখের পথে উঠার যোগ

বিএসপিএএনের উদ্যোগে বিশ্ব শোভন কর্ম দিবস পালন

শেয়ার বিজ নিউজ। জাতীয়। মঙ্গলবার

৮ অক্টোবর ২০২২

শ্রমজীবী জনগোষ্ঠীর সামাজিক সুরক্ষা ও শোভন কর্মপরিবেশ নিশ্চিত করার দাবি নিয়ে পালিত হলো- 'বিশ্ব শোভন কর্ম দিবস ২০২২'। দিবসটি উপলক্ষে বাংলাদেশ সোশ্যাল প্রোটেকশন অ্যাডভোকেসি নেটওয়ার্ক (বিএসপিএএন) রাজধানীর জাতীয় প্রেস ক্লাবের সামনে এক মানববন্ধন ও শোভাযাত্রার আয়োজন করে। যৌথভাবে এ আয়োজনের সহযোগী ছিল-বাংলাদেশ অকুপেশনাল সেইফটি, হেলথ অ্যাড এনভায়রনমেন্ট ফাউন্ডেশন (ওশি), জাতীয় গার্মেন্ট শ্রমিক ফেডারেশন ও গণস্বাস্থ্য কেন্দ্র।

মানববন্ধনে শ্রমিকদের অধিকার নিয়ে কাজ করা সংগঠনগুলোর নেতাকর্মীসহ প্রায় শতাধিক মানুষ অংশগ্রহণ করে। মানববন্ধনে জাতীয় গার্মেন্ট শ্রমিক ফেডারেশনের সভাপতি আমিরুল হক আমিন বলেন, 'শ্রমিক তার পরিবারসহ ভালোভাবে জীবনযাপন করার উপযোগী মজুরি, নিরাপদ কর্মস্থল, স্বাধীনভাবে ট্রেড ইউনিয়ন করার পূর্ণ অধিকার রাখে'।

তিনি স্পেশাল অর্থনৈতিক জোনে শ্রমিকদের ট্রেড ইউনিয়নের অধিকার সংরক্ষণ করা এবং কর্মক্ষেত্রে নারীর প্রতি সব ধরনের সহিংসতা বন্ধের দাবি জানান।

সভাপতির বক্তব্যে ওশি ফাউন্ডেশনের চেয়ারপারসন সাকি রিজওয়ানা বলেন, শোভন কর্ম শ্রমিকের অধিকার হলেও শ্রমিকরা সে অধিকার থেকে বঞ্চিত। এছাড়া শ্রমিকদের সামাজিক নিরাপত্তা ব্যবস্থা নিশ্চিতকরণে সংশ্লিষ্ট মহল এখনও উদাসীন। কর্মক্ষেত্রে দুর্ঘটনাজনিত বিমা সুবিধা চালুসহ সব শ্রমজীবী মানুষের জন্য সামাজিক নিরাপত্তা স্কিম চালু করতে সংশ্লিষ্ট মহলের কাছে তিনি আহ্বান জানান।

মানববন্ধনে বক্তারা বলেন, বাংলাদেশে কর্মপরিবেশের চিত্র খুবই অনিরাপদ ও ঝুঁকিপূর্ণ। প্রতি বছর কর্মক্ষেত্রে আশঙ্কাজনক হারে শ্রমিক হতাহতের সংখ্যা বাড়ছে। ওশি ফাউন্ডেশনের হিসাব অনুযায়ী ২০২১ সালের জানুয়ারি থেকে সেপ্টেম্বর পর্যন্ত দেশে ৫৫১ জন শ্রমিক হতাহতের শিকার হয়েছেন। তারা শ্রমিকদের জন্য শোভন কর্মপরিবেশ ও সামাজিক সুরক্ষা নিশ্চিতের দাবি জানান।



## Social Security is sorely need by marginalized working people



Social security is a human right. It is the responsibility of the government to provide social protection to underprivileged sections of the society. The total national budget of Bangladesh for fiscal year 2021-22 was 6.037 trillion BDT, of which 1.761 trillion BDT has been allocated to the social security sector. This is roughly 17.83 percent of the total budget and 3.11 percent of the Gross

Domestic Product (GDP). In the financial year 2020-2021, most of this allocation was spent on government employees' pensions and interest payments on national savings certificates, which together compose 31 percent of the total budget. The social safety net currently provided to the elderly, widows, and the disabled in the budget is totally inadequate compared to what is required. The current social protection allocation is only suitable for a half day's living expenses of the average family in the current market.

The pension system in our country is limited only to government officials and employees, despite the fact that such workers compose only 5 percent of the total labor force. Financial assistance is given in various ways, covering 148 activities in 17 sectors under 23 ministries. At present, the population above 60 years of age is about 15 million.

How rational is it to spend 31 percent of the budget on the welfare and income support of government employees who are already above the poverty line, all while there is no pension system in place for 95 percent of the country's total labor force?

Meanwhile, there is no social security provision for the working population. Again, COVID-19 has left a significant section of the working population in destitution, suffering from simultaneous income and food crises. Those most in need of relief and food assistance are workers in the informal sector, who are not covered by any social security programs, including government relief programs.

The pandemic has caused the cancellation of purchase orders within industry, increased the health risks faced by workers/employees, and led to lockdowns in the country, all causing untold misery for working people. According to the Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA), as of April 29, 2020, orders worth \$3.117 billion have been canceled or postponed in the ready-made garment (RMG) sector, affecting 22.2 million workers. As a result, a significant number of factories/establishments announced the closure of their operations. In such cases, some factories/establishments, especially those in export-oriented industries, announced lay-offs in their factories as per the provisions of the Labor Act. Others declared general holidays. However, it has also been observed that

factories/establishments have been shut down without any regard for regulations in sectors where workers have little or no opportunity to organize.

Layoffs began in a number of factories in various sectors but were especially pronounced in the ready-made garment industry. In the case of factories/establishments declaring lay-offs or retrenchment of workers, workers such as apprentices who have been employed for less than 1 year see the harshest impact. This is because, according to the Labor Act, this category of workers is not eligible for any service benefits or compensation. The Labor Act contains a detailed list of safeguards for management when the employer chooses to close or relocate the factory/establishment in response



to urgent need, but there is no effective labor-friendly provision in the Labor Act to guarantee the ongoing employment of workers in such situations. The protection of the worker in matters such as wage collection, compliance with the terms and conditions of employment, loss of employment, the filing of complaints, or approaching government offices and filing a case in the labor court all have to be taken through a long process.

The existing labor laws do not have any effective strategy or method to protect the jobs of the workers or collect dues in this situation. As a result, there is a tendency to solve such problems through street agitation, factory blockades, standing at the factory gate, or petitioning local influential people—all of which is an obstacle to sustainable industrial development, the cultivation of good relations between owners and workers, the maintenance of industrial production, and the development of a beautiful working environment in industry.

In the context of COVID-19, various problems regarding the issue of workers' job security and legal benefits have shown us that, faced with such an emergency, there is an increased demand for social security and/or a social safety net that includes employment guarantees or alternative legal benefits. In such a situation, it is absolutely necessary to provide social security for the working people of the country. And this requires effective social dialogue and the mobilization of political will through the active participation of all stakeholders. There is a need for timely legislation and its proper implementation. The social security of marginalized working people is a life and death issue.

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