

Bangladesh To Raise Pay For Garment Workers

Farid Hossain, Associated Press

DHAKA, Bangladesh (AP) — Bangladesh's government plans to raise the minimum wage for garment workers after the deaths of more than 1,100 people in the [collapse of a factory building](#) [1] focused attention on the textile industry's dismal pay and hazardous working conditions.

A new minimum wage board will issue recommendations for pay raises within three months, Textiles Minister Abdul Latif Siddiky said Sunday. The Cabinet will then decide whether to accept those proposals.

The wage board will include representatives of factory owners, workers and the government, he said.

The April 24 building collapse was one of the world's worst industrial disasters and has raised alarm about conditions in Bangladesh's powerful textile industry that supplies retailers globally.

Working conditions in the \$20 billion industry are grim, a result of government corruption, desperation for jobs, and industry indifference. Minimum wages for garment workers were last raised by 80 percent to 3,000 takas (\$38) a month in 2010 following protests by workers.

Rescue workers said 1,125 bodies had been recovered by late Sunday from the ruins of the fallen Rana Plaza building, which housed five garment factories employing thousands of workers. Teams were using hydraulic cranes, bulldozers, shovels and iron cutters to uncover bodies more than two weeks after the eight-story building collapsed.

"We are still removing the rubble very carefully as dead bodies are still coming up," said Maj. Moazzem Hossain, a rescue team leader.

Hossain said they are trying to identify badly decomposed bodies by their identity cards. "If we get the ID cards with the bodies then we are lucky," he said.

On Friday, the search teams received a much-needed morale boost when they found a seamstress who survived under the rubble for 17 days on dried food and bottled and rain water.

More than 2,500 survivors were rescued soon after the collapse, but until 19-year-old Reshma Begum was found the crews had gone nearly two weeks without discovering anyone alive.

Doctors said she was improving after treatment for dehydration, insomnia, stress and weakness.

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The Rana Plaza owner and eight other people, including garment factory owners, have been detained in the collapse investigation. Authorities say the building owner added floors to the structure illegally and allowed the factories to install heavy equipment that the building was not designed to support.

The Textiles Ministry has also begun a series of factory inspections and has ordered about 22 closed temporarily for violating safety and working standards.

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