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**SMART
Myanmar**



Women's Centers Experience Exchange (Report)

Funded by:



C&A Foundation



Thone Pan Hla Association
Better Together

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I. Fact Sheet

Women's Centers Experience Exchange

Purpose of the grant	Enabling an exchange of experience between garment industry women's centres in Bangladesh and in Myanmar in order to inform the design and concept of the new center in Myanmar and make it sustainable.
Duration	May 5 th 2016 to September 5 th 2016
Objective	<p>The activity is study mission to Bangladesh from Myanmar. The trip is designed to facilitate an exchange of experience between the existing garment industry women's centers in Bangladesh and the only garment industry women's center in Myanmar. This is particularly important in 2016, as the 2nd women's center is currently being designed by SMART Myanmar and Thone Pan Hla (a local women's civil society organization), with the intention to open its doors in November, 2016. As such, learning from the years of experience of existing centers in Bangladesh will be immensely instructive as Thone Pan Hla and SMART Myanmar seek to improve upon the existing model.</p> <p>In terms of gender and impact – approximately 2,000 women are already actively involved with the existing women's center in Yangon, known locally as the "Sunday Café". It is expected that expanding their model to a 2nd location will allow for a near-doubling of participation, thereby actively and regularly engaging several thousand women in Myanmar's garment sector. These women's centers serve both social and educational functions, providing legal advice, a community space and educational materials. They also serve as an empowerment mechanism, educating a core group of a few dozen women who can be leaders in their respective workplaces on the rights and responsibilities of workers.</p>
Expected Results	<p>The expected results are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Increased knowledge on alternative ways to run a women's community center focused on improving the lives and livelihoods of garment factory workers.• New ideas/approaches are fostered for the Myanmar group visiting Bangladesh.• Long-term connections are made with women's centers in Bangladesh for semi-regular exchange of ideas and approaches.• A better concept on how a women's center can be self-supporting and less reliant on outside donors is discussed.
Project Partner	Awaj Foundation (Dhaka, Bangladesh)
Project Beneficiaries	Thone Pann Hla (Women garment workers association)
Location of Beneficiaries	Yangon, Myanmar

II. Overview of Garment Industry in Bangladesh and Myanmar

General situation

Myanmar is presently regarded as a frontier market for foreign investment and international product sourcing. With weak industrial expertise, the country is poised to rapidly grow its labour intensive and extractives industries, tourism and agricultural sector.

In Myanmar, garment manufacturing is presently conducted by approximately 430 factories employing roughly 340,000 persons. The Myanmar government has recognized the garment industry as a priority sector for development and is aiming for the sector to employ hundreds of thousands of additional workers during the next few years. As of mid-2016, the industry is expanding rapidly with 30% annual growth in exports and a creation of roughly 4,000 new garment sector jobs per month.

Bangladesh has decades of international expertise and investment in garment and textile manufacturing and is second in size only to China. However, despite more than 30 years of industry growth and business success, fundamental problems remain in terms of worker quality of life. Poverty remains endemic and, similar to Myanmar's situation, workers often struggle to access basic health, legal and educational services.

Nevertheless, Bangladesh remains dominant and its garment industry continues to enjoy a robust annual growth trajectory, although now far surpassed regionally, in percentage terms, by both Vietnam and Myanmar.

Additional common problems beleaguering both countries include:

- Suitable, secure and sanitary accommodation is often lacking for workers.
- Educational opportunities for children and youth are inadequate and the provision of schooling does not adjust to cater to dynamic migration patterns.
- Rural to urban migration fuels garment industry growth but is not sufficiently handled by municipal service providers who are under-budgeted and overwhelmed by a flood of incoming rural migrants.
- Cogent policies and visions exist for industry development, but implementation often cannot be achieved due largely to a lack of government capacity to adjust to rapidly changing market circumstances.
- A dearth of institutions in industrial zones stymies the potential for human capital development. Schools, libraries and community centers are all either non-existent or extremely rare when examined on a per capita basis. (Hlaing Thayar Township, Yangon's garment epicenter, will soon surpass 1,000,000 citizens, and already has more than 100 garment factories – and many factories engaged in other industries – but there is not a single public library, no colleges or universities and there are exceptionally few secondary and primary schools.) Community centers of any sort are rare, small and lack resources.

III. Description of the action

SMART Myanmar organized an exchange trip for women working in Myanmar's garment industry to visit with women involved with the Bangladeshi garment industry. The purpose was to exchange views and approaches related with community support systems and training for garment workers.

This action was planned in cooperation with C&A Foundation. SMART Myanmar staff facilitated and arranged the involvement of members from one of the project's local stakeholders, Thone Pann Hla, a Myanmar civil society organization. C&A Foundation linked SMART Myanmar with Awaj Foundation, an organization which conducts many similar activities as Thone Pann Hla, but which has much more experience, a larger budget and larger capacity.

SMART Myanmar co-funded the activity by providing in-kind support in terms of staff time.

Ultimately, the activity achieved high impact for extremely low cost. Seven women from Myanmar's garment industry - factory workers, Thone Pann Hla staff and SMART Myanmar staff - were able to connect with and learn from counterparts in Dhaka who are engaged with many similar activities. This action is also planned to be replicated in future. In particular, SMART Myanmar and Thone Pann Hla will facilitate a visit to Yangon by members of Awaj Foundation.

Of the seven women involved from Myanmar, 6 of the 7 are migrants to Yangon - including 2 of 3 SMART staff and all of the women from Thone Pann Hla. Of the members of Thone Pann Hla (which counts approximately 2,000 "members") a majority are migrants from rural areas. Furthermore, 100% of their members are women working in garment and footwear factories.

Regarding sustainability, this study mission activity was not meant to be sustainable in and for itself, but was rather meant to inform the sustainability of Thone Pann Hla's future actions, specifically their 'Sunday Café' model which SMART Myanmar is helping them upscale. In this way, one major conclusion reached was that Thone Pann Hla's garment women's hostel is one unique element of their approach which deserves to be continued and strengthened. Beyond this, many of the participants of the study group were inspired by Awaj Foundation, to see Awaj achieving similar activities but in higher quality and at greater scale.

IV. Women's Cafés vs. Sunday Cafés

Bangladeshi context vs. Myanmar context

In Bangladesh, there are four organizations known to be operating what are commonly referred to as “women's cafés”. These operators are Awaj Foundation, Karmojibi Nari, Agrajattra and the Organization for Women's Development in Bangladesh.

These women's cafés are essentially small community centers for women and men working in the garment industry. They are run primarily by local foundations and NGOs and sponsored by a combination of partners including GIZ, C&A Foundation and several others.

In Myanmar, there is one similar such community center known commonly as the Sunday Café. It is run by a local civil society organization, Thone Pann Hla <http://www.businesskind.org/other-social-businesses/#thone-pan-hla>, and primarily operates only on Sundays. However, one appreciable difference from the Bangladeshi model and the Myanmar model is that the Sunday Café hosts a workers hostel for female migrants from rural areas in addition to a separate community space.

Sustainability approaches, common challenges and goals

- In Bangladesh most are known as women's cafés and garment workers centre in Myanmar is called the Sunday Café.
- The idea of the women's cafés came out from Awaj Foundation after various discussions on how to support women's empowerment. Whereas the Sunday Café idea came from an American designed initiative that was seemingly not influenced by the Bangladesh model.
- The current Thone Pann Hla Sunday Café started in 2013 and has 2000 members and one café location whereas Awaj (founded in 2003) is running 14 cafés with more than 100,000 members. Thone Pann Hla has 5 staff and Awaj is capacitated with over 70 staff and over 200 volunteers to support their operations.
- Awaj has more human capacity to undertake different programs from different donors and currently has 8 programs up and running. Different from Thone Pann Hla, Awaj has affiliated with the Confederation of the Trade Union in Bangladesh, whereas Thone Pann Hla focuses on civil society building, especially as it relates to education and capacity building of their members.
- Awaj offers different services to their members (health care, legal services, trainings on H&S, labour law awareness, leadership and financial calculation as well as training for singing and dancing for the workers and tailor training). Awaj has its own 3 lawyers, 4 legal assistants, 3 doctors and nurses. Doctors and lawyers visit cafés in rotation. Thone Pann Hla is still early in its development and is currently exploring ways to expand their services.
- Women's cafés run by Awaj have many workers and can convince workers to come in after work. Awaj recruits the women café members by approaching at the gates of the factories and also by running awareness programs by working with their field staffs and volunteers. The Sunday Café only runs on Sunday and has trouble convincing people to come after work as overtime in Myanmar is a very normal thing and women often have to work until 7pm.

V. Lessons learnt

At Awaj Foundation, the staff that are involved in their women's café operations are aware of the basic needs of the members and especially **expert** in their **national labour laws**. Therefore, a focus on making sure the existing managers and the newly hired managers and assistants are capable of applying this kind of knowledge for assisting their members is very useful.

Thone Pann Hla staff should be trained to give professional and consistent advice to members if they face conflicts in the factories. Thone Pann Hla is not a trade union so should not be directly handling the conflicts under their names in any way, but the organization can help its members by capacitating them on effective approaches, by giving advice that aligns with Myanmar's national laws (Labour Organization Law; Factory Act; Payment of Wages Act), and by **providing other legal information and resources**. The legal advisory service which SMART Myanmar/GIZ are setting up at the Sunday Café 2 can be designed so that Thone Pann Hla staff receive a ToT from a local lawyer on general legal advice. Print out flyers or booklets about the keys of labour law, health and safety, basic knowledge for social and environmental standards can be helpful. In Addition, the Ludo Game to test the knowledge on Labour Law, Fire and Safety, Trade Unions and Gender issues (a great mechanism for socialising and entertaining after work) is applicable at Thone Pann Hla.

Awaj Foundation is trying several ways to sustain their operations but still needs donor contribution for most parts and they are fully capacitated to take on different projects and being able to implement them. Thone Pann Hla has been working with several donor agencies but SMART Myanmar should also support them to get a **direct contact with some brands that produce in Myanmar**. Grant writing skills and report writing skills may also be beneficial. Currently they are operating a small hostel (with 16 women) and charging them below market rates to sustain some operations of the café. The Sunday Café space isn't occupied, other than by hostel residents, from Mon – Sat and they should look into renting out the venue space to weddings, private meetings, vocational classes or for other purposes.

SMART Myanmar/GIZ will fund the **legal counselling and mediation service** on a regular basis (at least once a month) for all Thone Pann Hla members. Telephone consultancy is not a right way to go, people prefer to seek sensitive legal advice in person. However, what was discovered in Bangladesh is that **general awareness and knowledge on national laws** is perhaps even more important than running this service. If the members of Thone Pann Hla don't know they have problems or that they are being treated by their employers in illegal ways, then they will not come to consult with the lawyer at the Café. **Sunday Café managers and newly hired staff shall be trained by the lawyer on a ToT approach to spread awareness and also to assist with legal advisory services**, and it is a way to make this service more sustainable, too.

Family planning and education on hygiene and sexually transmitted diseases can be given during the Sunday Café gatherings. **Marie Stopes** has a new branch opening at Hlaing Thar Yar from September, 2016 and there should be a linkage with them. Thone Pann Hla should look in to signing MoU with them and also let them do awareness/promotion on what they offer.

Thone Pann Hla's **hostel model** is especially unique when compared with cafés in Bangladesh and it seems to insert significant added value, a greater sense of ownership and community involvement and an extra element of sustainability to the operation via revenue generation. The hostel is planned to be replicated at Sunday Café 2 and should thereafter be carefully evaluated and assessed. The hostels should aim for measurable key performance indicators, especially 1) **revenue generation targets** 2) Target for servicing at-risk and vulnerable women and 3) General annual occupancy targets, whereby it is recognized that the Sunday Café hostels are intended for short-term occupants rather than long-term occupants.

Myanmar's culture has strong elements of matriarchy which date back thousands of years. In SMART Myanmar's experience, women in the garment industry exercise societal power roles equivalent with men. Women are just as likely as men to become managers and supervisors. With all that said, the vast majority of individuals, both male and female, coming from rural areas to urban areas face tremendous asymmetries of information regarding prevailing wages and compensation structures, common workplace requirements and practically all migrants from the village areas lack an adequate knowledge of up-to-date laws. **As such, the education and empowerment of all migrants from rural areas is essential. Workers – indeed, all citizens, should understand their rights and responsibilities under the law.**

More garment factories are setting up further and further from Yangon's urban core. This should have important implications for programs which target garment factories and their workforces. Significant concentrations of garment factories now exist in Hmawbi, Bago and Patheingyi, employing tens of thousands of workers. New garment factories have also started in and around Mandalay and also in relatively isolated areas such as Meiktila.

The housing situation of garment workers is often appalling. Thone Pann Hla operates their hostel partly as a safe place for vulnerable young women, partly as a revenue generator for their organization and also partly as a model for what hostel/dormitory owners can aim for in terms of sanitary, safe and decent accommodation. The recent study mission to Bangladesh revealed that **housing for garment workers in Dhaka is, one can argue, even worse than housing for workers in Yangon.** The Bangladeshi garment industry grew for decades and many companies and individuals prospered, but somehow workers were seemingly left behind in terms of their material conditions and living situations. This should be unacceptable for everyone involved and a repetition should be avoided as the Myanmar garment industry grows.

The Myanmar garment industry is increasing in size at a rate of roughly 4,000 new workers per month, complimented by an additional 1,000 new workers per month in related industries (footwear and accessories manufacturing). At the present rate of growth the industry will have nearly doubled in size from 2013 to 2016, both in terms of employee numbers (from 200,000 to 400,000 and in terms of exports (from 1.2 billion USD to a little over 2 billion USD). In such a dynamic market, it is critical for donors to be adaptable to rapidly changing circumstances. These 200,000 additional workers are mostly migrants from small towns and villages, and they place tremendous housing and municipal services requirements on the cities where they have relocated.

VII. Conclusion

The Bangladesh trip confirmed that the approach with the Cafés can play a very important role in educating workers, especially female workers. Therefore its replication in Myanmar needs to be supported and fostered. Combined efforts of foreign buyers, government institutions, international agencies, business associations and workers' organizations have been the most successful approach to increase compliance with social standards. The challenge regarding the sustainability of the Cafés must be born in mind from the very beginning and services introduced in the Cafés shall be designed carefully in a sustainable manner in order to continue after the funding ends. One example may be the legal counselling and mediation service that shall be introduced at low or no cost in high quality. Special training and services are needed for new migrant workers entering the garment sector. Another example may be the dormitory and laundry service offered in Myanmar but not in Bangladesh. These may be viewed as an approach to partially co-finance the Cafés and may be one part of the sustainability strategy of Women Cafés in Bangladesh. The Sunday Café 2 is presently being set-up and all of the observations by the group are currently influencing and informing the set-up of this new location so that the original Sunday Café model can be further improved upon. Delegates from Bangladesh will visit Myanmar's Sunday Cafés as a next step.

This study mission was extremely valuable for both SMART Myanmar and Thone Pann Hla and all involved are grateful to the C&A Foundation for making it possible. Special thanks go to Maeve Galvin and Jill Tucker, both of whom provided direct supportive advice and linkages for the group as the study delegation identified counterparts in Bangladesh. A link with Awaj Foundation would not have happened without their support.

VIII. Annexes

Annex A List of organisations

Annex B List of delegates

Annex C Agenda

Annex D Evaluation of the trip

Annex E Photos

Annex F Media coverage

Annex A

List of organisations

ORGANISATIONS	EXPERT/STAFF
Awaj Foundation	Board of Directors <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • President • General Secretary • Treasurer • Executive Committee Member Together with <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Director of Operation • Program Director
Women Café Rasulbagh (by Awaj)	Café Manager Café Assistants Field staff to recruit women café members Members
Impactt	Program Officer for UP! Project (this program is funded by C&A and implemented by Awaj, managed by Impactt)
Awaj Training Centre	Lead trainer Program Coordinator Cell leaders of the women cafés Other trainees
Legal Advisory Service (by Awaj)	2 Lawyers 3 Legal Assistants
Trade union leaders of a particular factory (SGSF)	President General Secretary
GiZ	Program Coordinator Senior Advisor 2 Social Compliance Advisors Advisor (SLSG project)
Marie Stopes	Medical Consultant (doctor)
Health Care Centre, Rashulbagh (by Awaj)	Health Care Advisor (doctor) Nurse
Women Café, Badda (by Awaj)	Cultural singing and dancing teachers Members
Colossus Apparel Ltd (FDI)	General Manager Human Resource and Compliance Manager
BKMEA	Sr. Asst. Secretary (Compliance)
Women Café, Maleaker Bari, Gazipur (by Awaj)	Café Manger and Members

Annex B

List of delegates

No.	Name	Position	Organisation/ Company.	Contact
1.	Su Tayar Lin	Project Manager	SMART Myanmar	su@smartmyanmar.org
2.	May Mi Kyaw	Social Compliance Expert	SMART Myanmar	maymi@smartmyanmar.org
3	Zar Chi Oo	Project Coordinator	SMART Myanmar	zarchi@smartmyanmar.org
4.	Than Dar Ko	Director	Business Kind Myanmar Thone Pann Hla	thandarko.bkm@gmail.com
5.	Hnin Malar Myint	Sunday Café Manager	Thone Pann Hla	
6.	Aye Cho Khaing	Member and female garment worker	Thone Pann Hla	
7.	Khin Thuzar Khine	Member and female garment worker	Thone Pann Hla	

Annex C

Agenda

Date	Time	Activity
23/07/2016	18:00	Arrival to Dhaka
24/07/2016	08:00 – 09:00	Briefing to the delegates by Su Tayar Lin
	10:00 – 11:30	Meeting at Awaj H/O with the Executive Board of the Foundation
	11:30 – 11:45	Tea Break
	11:45 – 12:40	Visit Rasulbagh Women Café
	12:40 – 13:45	Lunch Break
	14:00 – 15:30	Observe Leader Training at Rasulbagh Women Cafés and the training centre
	15:30 – 16:00	Meeting with all administrative and supporting staff of Awaj Foundation
	16:00 – 16:45	Meeting with Awaj Legal Advisory Team
	16:45 – 17:30	Meeting with Trade Union Leaders of a factory to discuss grievance procedures and complaints handling.
	18:00 – 19:30	Dinner with Awaj Foundation, General Secretary
25/07/2016	09:30 – 10:30	Meeting with Giz projects (PSES & SLSG)
	11:20 – 12:30	Meeting with Maries Stopes (NGO supporting low income earning families with family planning issues)
	12:30 – 13:30	Lunch Break
	14:30 – 16:00	Observe Freedom of Association training at Uttara conducted by Awaj Foundation for Trade Union Leaders, Dhaka
	18:00 – 18:30	Meeting with the Health Care Advisor at Rashulbagh Women Café
	18:30 – 18:45	Observe some medical consultation at the health care center

26/07/2016	19:00 – 23:00	Observing Cultural Event at Badda Café by Awaj Foundation
	10:00	Factory visit to Gazipur
	12:00 – 14:00	Meeting and factory tour at Colossus Apparel Ltd
	15:00 – 16:30	Visit Maleaker Bari Cafés at Gazipur to observe the Ludo Game and closing meeting with Awaj (presented by Director Operation)
27/07/2016	09:30	Departure to Yangon

Annex D

Evaluation of the trip



Evaluation form

Women Centers Exchange Trip to Dhaka, Bangladesh

(July 23-27, 2016)

a) Are you satisfied with the meetings and the places we visited during the trip in Dhaka?

(1) poor (2) needs improvement (3) average (4) good (5) excellent

b) Are you satisfied with the arrangement/management of the trip?

(1) poor (2) needs improvement (3) average (4) good (5) excellent

c) Are you satisfied with the knowledge gained during the trip?

(1) poor (2) needs improvement (3) average (4) good (5) excellent

d) Any more advices for the better trip in the future?

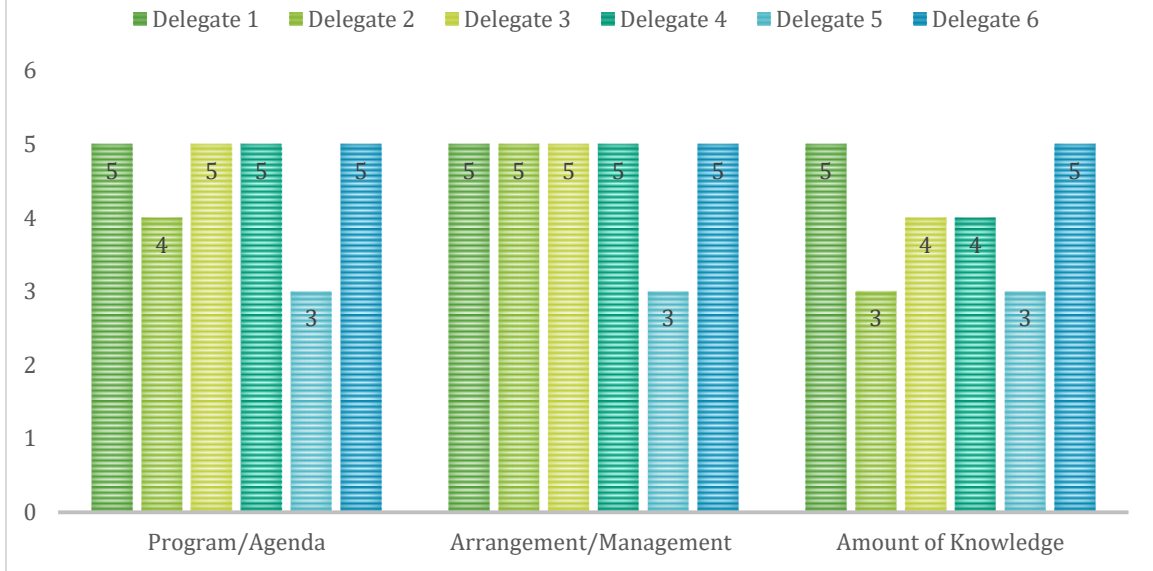
e) Any more questions which could not have a change to ask during the trip?

f) Any other comments?

Thank you!



EVALUATION SCORE



Annex E

Photos

PHOTO



DESCRIPTION

Observe Leader Training at Rasulbagh Women Café and the training centre



Meeting with Trade Union Leaders of a factory to discuss grievance procedures and complaints handling



Meeting with the Legal Advisory Team



Rasulbagh Women Cafés



Dinner with Nazma



At Giz



Awaj Foundation Office



FOA training at Uttara, Dhaka



Cultural Event at Badda Café



Health Care Center Rasulbagh Women Café



Colossus Apparel Ltd





Ludo Game Maleaker Bari Café at Gazipur



Annex F

Media coverage

- <http://frontiermyanmar.net/en/business/garment-sector-delegation-visits-dhaka-study-womens-centres>
- http://www.just-style.com/news/global-news-roundup_id128447.aspx
- <http://en.prothom-alo.com/bangladesh/news/114115/Garment-sector-delegation-visits-Dhaka-to-study>
- http://banglaapparel.com/en/news/2016-07-31_14:10:32:0.163887001469952632.en.html
- <http://www.fibre2fashion.com/news/apparel-news/myanmar-women-garment-workers-on-study-trip-to-b-desh-190880-newsdetails.htm>
- <http://consult-myanmar.com/2016/08/01/myanmar-women-garment-workers-on-study-trip-to-bdesh/>



বাংলাদেশ সফরের সময় মিয়ানমারের প্রতিনিধিদল একটি পোশাক কারখানা পরিদর্শনে গেলে তাদের ক্রেস্ট দিয়ে স্বাগত জানানো হয়।
ছবি : কাদের রুট

মিয়ানমারের 'রোল মডেল'

এম সায়ম টিপু >

দীর্ঘ তিন দশকেরও বেশি সময় ধরে অনেক বাধাবিপত্তি ডিঙিয়ে বাংলাদেশ আজ বিশ্বের দ্বিতীয় বৃহত্তম পোশাক রপ্তানিকারক দেশ। আমাদের রপ্তানি আয়ের ৮০ শতাংশই আসে তৈরি পোশাক খাত থেকে। এই সাফল্য এখন দুঃস্থ হিমসেবে উপস্থাপিত হচ্ছে দেশে দেশে। এই সাফল্যের পথে এগিয়ে যেতে চায় প্রতিবেশী দেশ মিয়ানমারও। পোশাক খাতে এই সাফল্যের রহস্য সন্ধানে গত মাসে বাংলাদেশে এসেছিল মিয়ানমারের একটি বেসরকারি প্রতিষ্ঠান 'স্মার্ট মিয়ানমার'-এর একটি প্রতিনিধিদল। সাত সদস্যের দলটি তিন দিনের সফর শেষে গত ২৭ জুলাই দেশে ফিরে যায়। ঢাকা ভ্রমণের আগে তাদের প্রতিক্রিয়া ছিল-বাংলাদেশে তৈরি পোশাক খাতের এমন

সাফল্য সত্যিই বিম্বয়কর!

বাংলাদেশে শ্রমিক অধিকার নিয়ে কাজ করে এমন একটি বেসরকারি সংস্থা আওয়াজ ফাউন্ডেশন। মূলত এই সংস্থার আমন্ত্রণেই মিয়ানমারের দলটি বাংলাদেশে আসা। প্রতিনিধিদলে ছিলেন স্মার্ট মিয়ানমারের প্রকল্প পরিচালক সু তায়ার দিন, সোশ্যাল কমপ্লেক্স বিশেষজ্ঞ মে মি কেয়াও, প্রকল্প সমন্বয়কারী জার চি ও, শ্রমিক অধিকার নিয়ে কাজ করা প্রতিষ্ঠান খানে পান হালের পরিচালক থানডর কু ও হানিন মালার মাইট। আই চা খায়িং ও যিন তুজার খায়িং নামের দুজন পোশাক কর্মীও ছিলেন তাদের সঙ্গে। বাণিজ্য নিষেধাজ্ঞা শিথিল হওয়ার পর থেকে পোশাক খাতে মনোযোগ দিয়েছে মিয়ানমার। নতুন এই যাত্রায় প্রতিবেশী বাংলাদেশের

▶▶ পৃষ্ঠা ৭ ক. ৪

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