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Editorial: Five years on from the collapse of Rana Plaza: how reliable and competitive is Bangladesh as a sourcing location?

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Abstracts

It is over five years since more than 1,100 people were killed and several hundred others injured as a result of the collapse on April 24, 2013, of Rana Plaza—an eight-storey commercial building near Dhaka, Bangladesh, which housed a shopping mall and five garment factories and employed more than 3,000 workers. Garments made at the factories were supplied to a number of apparel retailers and brands in Europe and North America. Most of the people who died were apparel workers. Several initiatives aimed at improving factory and building safety in Bangladesh were established in the months following the building's collapse and much was achieved in the early years. But progress has slowed and most of the factories which were initially inspected have still not been fully remediated. The industry also has a number of other issues, including strikes over low wages, poor treatment of workers and security fears. At the same time, suppliers are being squeezed on price by buyers. The garment industry is vital for the country. It employs over 4 mn people—and is a big employer of women. Also, it accounts for over 80% of the country's exports. As such, it is imperative that the problems besetting the industry continue to be addressed. In this report, Robin Anson discusses the progress achieved in efforts to make the apparel industry in Bangladesh safer and assesses the impact which the collapse of Rana Plaza has had on the country's garment exports. Also, he speculates on whether the momentum of improving factory safety can be maintained, given that the Alliance for Bangladesh Worker Safety comes to an end in May 2018 and responsibility is being handed to a group of local partners.

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