

Roles of Government Agents in Industrial Relations in Ready-Made Garment Industry of Bangladesh: A Qualitative Approach

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Abstract

Purpose: The purpose of this study is to investigate the roles of Government Agents in maintaining Industrial Relations in the Ready-made Garment (RMG) industry of Bangladesh.

Methods: This is a cross-sectional study using a qualitative approach and interpretative paradigm. A total of 23 face-to-face in-depth interviews were performed using the convenience sampling technique. A semi-structured interview with open-ended questions was used in this analysis. The process of data analysis for this study was performed using content analysis.

Findings: From this study, it is revealed that Government Agents play their roles as umpires, conciliators, arbitrators, and administrators in industrial relations. They act in the system of industrial relations as both a planner and an administrator as well the play predominant roles in various tripartite bodies.

Implications: This study contributes to the literature on industrial relations particularly in the RMG sector of Bangladesh. The findings of the study will encourage the stakeholders of the sector towards putting their trust in the roles of government agents, and consequently, the stakeholders involved will come forward to establish the rights of workers, make workers aware of their rights, ensure collective bargaining and labor welfare, and maintain better employer-employee relations.

Limitations: This study will have use combine qualitative methods with quantitative methods to have more reliability and realization of the sought problem could be obtained precisely. Moreover, the results of this study might not explain the same problem from a different perspective even in the same industry in a different economy as well the conclusions reached in the study may not have universal application.

Originality: This research will be the first-ever effort in Bangladesh to investigate the roles of the government agents towards the parties of industrial relations in the RMG industry of Bangladesh.

Keywords: Industrial Relations, Government Agents, Ready-made Garment, Qualitative Approach, Content Analysis

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Introduction

Ready-made Garment (RMG) is considered the biggest export-earning industry in Bangladesh and acts as the driver of economic growth which pushes this country from lower to middle-income levels (Chowdhury & Shajahan, 2021). This identical industry is the second biggest exporter industry in the world after China amounting to \$34 billion which is 84.21% of the total export of the country (Khan & Roy, 2022). Apart from its contribution as an export-earning industry, the RMG played an important role in employment generation, poverty alleviation, and empowering women (Barua, Wiersma & Ansary, 2021).

The industry refers to any successful operation whereby individuals work together to achieve predetermined goals and objectives (Sisson, 2008). Relationships develop when people work together for the purpose of production in a cooperative way (Hom et al., 2009). The better and higher output depends on the harmonious relations among the actors. According to John T. Dunlop (1958), Industrial Relations (IRs) are consisting of three actors: trade unions (TUs), employers, and GAs.

Thus, an actor in an IRs can be defined as a person, a group, or an entity that can directly affect the IRs process through its action (Bellemare, 2000). IRs are associated with the association between TUs, employers, and GAs in the industry (Hyman, 1975). However, Heery and Frege (2006) argued that end users (client and consumer organizations) are actors within IRs to the degree that they have an ongoing and important effect on the form of the relationship between employment and the actions of TUs, employers, and GAs. International buyers (IBs) can thus be considered significant actors along the intensity dimension of an act (Bellemere, 2000).

A government agent is regarded as the third actor in IRs (Hyman, 1975). The government refers to a group of people that governs a community or unit (Fallon, 1992). GAs refers to all organs established by the government in its efforts to supervise, control, and administer government policies on IRs (Okaka & Eriaguna, 2011). The GAs acts in the system of IRs as both a planner and an administrator (Fudge, 2015). In Bangladesh, there are different authorities and agencies responsible for executing and monitoring the laws and regulations (Absar, 2012).

The Ministry of Labor and Employment (MoLE) is responsible for formulating the strategy and managing the divisions and agencies that are under it. The MoLE has implementation departments such as the Department of Labor (DoL), Department of Inspections for Factories and Establishment (DIFE), Manpower Bureau, Jobs and Training, Minimum Wages Board (MWB), Labor Appeal Tribunal and seven Labor Courts (Al Faruque, 2009). GAs plays the roles of umpires, conciliators, arbitrators, and administrators in the IRs (Badejo, 2011). The GAs also plays predominant roles in various tripartite bodies (Hyman, 2008).

Even then, RMG factories in Bangladesh have faced a range of accidents in recent years, the latest being the Rana Plaza collapse, the worst industrial accident in India since the Bhopal disaster of 1984 (Hossain & Arefin, 2015). Working with each other, the actors come into conflict regarding their respective interests (Hak-Soo, 2010; Rose, 2004). The labor law 2006 and its amends in 2013, 2015, and 2018 formulated by the government are applied in the field of IRs in Bangladesh covering the roles of the actors of IRs (Al Faruque, 2009; Mia, 2016).

The actors of IRs are playing their roles in the RMG industry of Bangladesh to bring a harmonious relationship among them for a tranquil working environment in the industry (Kabir, Singh & Ferrantino, 2019). But the RMG sector of Bangladesh still suffers from poor working conditions, continued negligence of labor rights, and weak enforcement mechanisms (Ahmed & Nathan, 2016; Saha & Mazumder, 2015; Siddiqua, Chowdhury & Islam, 2014). In this respect, significant questions have been asked regarding the roles of GAs in maintaining IRs in the RMG sector in Bangladesh. The present study will investigate the roles of GAs towards the IRs in RMG of Bangladesh using the case study method.

Literature Review

In a certain sense, the IRs can be seen as a game. There are always two players, workers, and the owners. And there are always rules that are formally stated or institutionally accepted. There are six significant roles that the GAs plays in the IRs game. They are the legislator, administrator, peacemaker, participant, adjudicator, and guardian (Ungku Abdul Aziz 1967). In most developing countries the GAs exercises a dominant role in determining the basic characteristics of the country's IRs.

Adams (1992) describes that GAs is an actor of IRs system and their actions have been treated almost exclusively as an independent variable and only rarely as the phenomenon to be explained. Maintaining a positive IRs in society is fundamentally dependent on the position of the government as an agent in the structure of IRs as it is the government's responsibility to devise labor laws and regulations, to enforce them, and therefore to maintain fairness such that neither the employees nor the employers suffer (Müller-Jentsch, 2004).

It is evident that any kind of GAs interference in labor conflicts will weaken the partnership between employers and employees (Rogowski, 2010). The government is not a single actor, strictly speaking, but it is made up of several separate agencies, each with its own distinct intent and role (Katz, Kochan & Gobeille, 1983). The division of political, economic, and judicial functions may therefore be somewhat arbitrary.

In fact, instead of a single or uniform group, the government is very much an open system (Hyman, 2013). The expression of the GAs, however, as the actor, is appropriate shorthand to capture the interactions of all the institutions and agencies that carry out the government's will

(Hyman, 2008). The GAs thus became a necessity for directing and controlling the passions, emotions, actions of individuals, and standardizing human relationships, and interventionist machinery. The IRs focus on the rules that regulate the employment relationship, the institutions involved in this process, and the power dynamics among the key regulatory agents, according to Hyman (2007). GAs establishes and administers policies and programs and exercises executive, political, and sovereign powers through state customs, institutions, and laws (Sarooshi, 2003).

It is incontestable that GAs performs specific functions in any industrial system (Omotayo & Ome-Egeonu, 2015). Government makes legislation in the area of IRs and GAs mediates conflicts between the different actors in an industrial dispute by way of arbitration and conciliation (Williams & Adam-Smith, 2010). William and Adam-Smith (2010) earlier cited described the GAs as the regulator and providers of the socio-legal environment within which industrial activities take place. It is thus the mediator in industrial disputes involving employers or their agents and employees or their agents (TUs).

Industrial relations in Bangladesh's RMG are now far more affected than ever by government regulations and the GAs have become what is likely to be one of the IRs' most powerful actors (Al Faruque, 2009). It not only limits the right of managers and unions to monitor the IRs' data, but the game's rules are now often set out in more highly specific and prescribed ways. The intervention of GAs has affected IRs in Bangladesh's RMG over the past quarter-century (Afrin, 2014). GAs are designated to track the implementation of favorable investment and industrial policies, promote foreign direct investment, set up export processing zones, and organize trade fairs within and outside the country (Haider, 2007).

Labor rights are protected by government agents (Al Faruque, 2009). As the IR and social justice defender, the GAs are responsible for resolving relationships based on respect for basic human rights and the basis of labor rights, so that the majority of workers can share social change and the results of economic growth to achieve industrial balance (Dundon & Rollinson, 2004). The GAs reinforces their method of preserving the well-being of the workplace in the industrial sector with the growth of the scientific development concept.

According to previous research, GAs plays a central role in the development of IRS by implementing and systematizing structural reform through a collection of specific public capacities; narrating an objective analysis of the crisis in IRs; solving the joint action problems of employers and unions; and predicting and establishing partnerships among private industrial actors. It also plays a vital role in executing and monitoring wages, working environment, health and safety, discipline, and dispute, in order to improve the general well-being of the relations among the actors.

There are some claims regarding the working conditions of the RMG sector in Bangladesh like poor social compliance which include the inadequate application of labor standards by the RMG sector, and labor rights, legislation, and implementation, effective facility for negotiation (Saha & Mazumder, 2015) which are the consequences of improper relationships among the actors of IRs. Moreover, poor working environment, unskilled workforce, political instability, low wage, and inadequate infrastructure creates huge losses for this sector. All these things are responsible for unstable IRs in the RMG sector of Bangladesh (Sarker & Afroze, 2014). Such problems direct the following research questions of this study:

RQ1: What roles do government agents play in maintaining industrial relations in the RMG industry of Bangladesh?

Objectives of This Study The objective of this paper is to investigate the roles of government agents in maintaining industrial relations in the RMG industry of Bangladesh.

Research Methodology

Design of The Study: This is a cross-sectional study using an interpretive research paradigm. In this paper, the researchers present a qualitative investigation of the roles of GAs in IRs in the RMG industry of Bangladesh. Under this method, a face-to-face in-depth interview with open-end questions was conducted for having a better understanding and exploring the research subjects' opinions, behavior, experiences, and phenomenon of participants. The semi-structured questionnaire was designed and developed by considering the literature review.

Sample Selection: Convenience sampling was employed in this research. In qualitative research, the process of convenience sampling is valid (Etikan, Musa & Alkassim, 2016). Personal contacts-based convenience sampling was applied (White, Lansky, Goel, Wilson, Hladik, Hakim & Frost, 2012). In qualitative research, there are no computations or power analyses that can be performed to determine the minimum number and types of sampling units needed a priori (Fugard & Potts, 2015). For certain kinds of homogeneous or essential case sampling, a sample size of 10 might be considered sufficient (Sandelowski, 1995). In the existing research, 23 cases that are taken as the participants of this study were selected to be interviewed based on personal connections, such as the authority of DoL, DIFE, Industrial Relations Institute, Owner, Employee Representatives, Labor Court, and the Management of the RMG factories. The following table illustrates the profiles of the field research interview participants and those of the organizations they worked for.

Table I: Field Study Interview Participant's Profiles

Participants	Position	Department/Organization
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P # 1	Registrar of TUs	Department of Labor
P# 2	Assistant Director	Department of Labor
P# 3	Assistant Director	Department of Labor
P # 4	Assistant Director	Department of Labor
P # 5	Assistant Director	Department of Labor
P# 6	Employer	RMG Factory
P# 7	Employer	RMG Factory
P # 8	Employer	RMG Factory
P# 9	Employer	RMG Factory
P# 10	Director	Industrial Relations Institute
P # 11	Deputy-director	Industrial Relations Institute
P# 12	Assistant director	Industrial Relations Institute
P #13	Research Officer	Industrial Relations Institute
P # 14	Inspector	Department of Inspection of Factories and Establishment
P #15	Inspector	Department of Inspection of Factories and Establishment
P #16	Inspector	Department of Inspection of Factories and Establishment
P #17	Inspector	Department of Inspection of Factories and Establishment
P #18	Inspector	Department of Inspection of Factories and Establishment
P #19	TUs Representative	RMG Factory
P #20	TUs Representative	RMG Factory
P #21	TUs Representative	RMG Factory
P#22	Lawyer	Labor Court
P#23	Lawyer	Labor Court

Data Collection: A total of 23 in-depth interviews were carried out at the study site from September 2021 to January 2022. These interviews were conducted to understand the respondents' views on the role of GAs towards the IRs in the RMG industry of Bangladesh. Before taking interviews with the respondents, permission was taken from the respective organizations and the interviewees. However, at the month of September 2021, the researchers visited the study site and tried to develop a relationship with the authority of DoL, DIFE, the Industrial Relations Institute, the Owner, employee representatives, and the management of the RMG factories. The researchers were able to conduct 6 interviews as a pilot test on the initial questionnaire which is designed based on the research questions and objectives of this study. After returning from the field, then few modifications were done on the basis of respondents' inclination toward specific issues. After modifying the questionnaire, 23 interviews had been conducted in the month of September 2021 to January 2022 until the information saturation stage was reached. During the interview, the participants were requested to allow recording their speech by using the mobile recorder. Most of the participants were allowed but very few did not. In the case of the respondents who did not allow to use the recorder, key points were noted down. For data analysis, the verbatim transcriptions of all recorded interviews were completed to ensure accurate data from the discussions of participants, body language, and others (Merriam, 1997).

Data Analysis: To analyze the data gathered from the field study, first, the interviews were transcribed by using the verbatim mobile records and the notes written down during the interviews. Then, to examine and evaluate the collected data, the content analysis approach was used (Lune & Berg, 2017) to assess the relationship between the ideas, the interview data, and the theoretical context (Siltaoja, 2006). In order to scrutinize the transcripts and evaluate constructs, sub-variables, main items, and the relation between the items, the content analysis approach is also used. During the content analysis, the transcriptions of the conducted interviews were gone through very carefully to uncover keywords or themes. After uncovering the keywords, the relevant items, variables, and corresponding constructs were labeled and categorized. Then, with identical characteristics previously observed in the literature, the structures, variables, and objects were balanced. Similarities and discrepancies between variables under each object were found among the responses from all participants in the data analysis procedure and were given a new name after being combined.

Interview Piloting: A pilot interview has been conducted to know whether the proposed methods of collecting data were performed in accordance with the aims of this study. Pilot interviews were done with officials of the department of labor, the department for inspection of factories and establishments (DIFE), authorities of the Industrial Relations Institute (IRI), TUs representatives, employers, and lawyers of a labor court. Six interviews were conducted to obtain perceptions regarding the matters which were essential to the issues under study from 22

September to 25 September 2021. After conducting the pilot interviews, the data were manually analyzed, and finally, a decision was taken as the necessity for using a software package to carry out the entire study. The decision was primarily adopted based on the volume of data. The profile of pre-testing of this study is shown in table II below.

Table II: The Profile of Pilot Survey

Respondents	Number
Registrar of Trade Union, DoL	1
Inspector, DIFE	1
Employer	1
TUs Representative	1
Lawyer, Labor Court	1
Total	6

At the outset, six in-depth interviews were conducted in the pre-test with interview participants. After the pre-test interviews, the researcher improved the interview questions and the participants indicated their misunderstanding regarding the questions, and accordingly, the researcher adjusted the interview questions.

Table III: Codes Applied to Extract Responses from Pilot-test Interviews

Data Extract	Coded for
Government agents regularly monitor the implication of labor acts and regulations. (Interview no.: 04, Personal Communication, Factory Inspector, DIFE, Dhaka, 25.09.2021)	Practices of Labor Act

<p>The roles of government agents are positive in the RMG sector because the government always expects a good working environment and sound relations among the parties of the factories.</p> <p>(Interview no.: 2, Personal Communication, Factory Inspector, DIFE, Dhaka, 24.09.2021)</p>	<p>Congenial Working Environment</p>
<p>The Freedom of association and mutual acceptance of the right to collective representation resulting from ILO Conventions 87 and 98 are among the four basic values and freedoms at work promoted by the government.</p> <p>(Interview no.: 3, Personal Communication, Registrar, Trade Unions, DoL, Dhaka, 23.09.2021)</p>	<p>Promoting Freedom of Association</p>
<p>Government agents are playing vital roles to ensure collective bargaining in the RMG industry in order to promote sound industrial relations.</p> <p>(Interview no.: 1, Personal Communication, TU representative, Arunima Group, Zirabo, Savar, Dhaka, 22.09.2021)</p>	<p>Upholding Collective Bargaining</p>
<p>The government agents regularly take care regarding dispute resolution initiatives taken by all the parties which are important ways to minimize and control disputes in the industry under study.</p> <p>(Interview no.: 6, Personal Communication, Lawyer, Labor Court, Dhaka, 10.01.2022)</p>	<p>Dispute Resolution Initiatives</p>
<p>Government agents take feedback from the parties regarding the maintenance of the buyers' codes of conduct.</p> <p>(Interview no.: 5, Personal Communication, Employer, Plummy Fashions Limited, Dhaka, 09.01.2022)</p>	<p>Monitoring Buyers' Codes of Conduct</p>

Field Study and Results

Through the content analysis of the data obtained from the interviews, the reality and accuracy of the roles of GAs towards the IRs in the RMG industry of Bangladesh were examined. The views of the participants are considered very carefully during the data collection since they share their views based on their expertise and real-world experience. The data captured reflected the participants' responses in the sense of IRs in the Bangladesh RMG industry. All participants in field study interviews were found to agree with the positive roles in establishing IRs with little variation. Particularly, from the interviews with the respondents the roles and actions of GAs are clearly identifiable. The involvement of GAs can be characterized by the intensity of their present role in the IRs in the RMG industry of Bangladesh. In fact, as stated earlier, the emphasis of the field study was on validating the roles of GAs. Examples of links identified by the interview participants are given in the quotations from the transcripts below.

Practicing Bangladesh Labor Act and Sections: In the view of labor laws, capital and labor both are equally important. The main objective of labor laws is to create an exclusive relationship between capital and labor (Xi, 2019). Labor laws reflect the connection to jobs. It includes the guidelines of how to negotiate a labor contract, what privileges and duties the actors of IRs have under such a contractual arrangement, how much the actors can dispose of such rights and duties by securing substitute provisions, and, lastly, how to end a labor contract. It is a significant feature of labor laws that it protects the concerned parties from the possibility of unfair treatment. This mediates certain facets of the employers-employees-workforces and unions relationship. Some of the interviewees said about this,

.....as the government has some bodies like the department of labor, the department for inspection of factories and establishment, the minimum wage board, labor welfare trust that assists to protect labor rights and interests. The government takes the necessary steps and supports the industrial units to manage sound relations by monitoring the implications of the rules and regulations formulated by them.....

(Interview no.: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22 and 23)

The BLA 2006 is one of the very recent acts with major overhauling changes in the field of labor legislation, which is amended, time-to-time last in 2018 to cope with the changes and overcome the drawbacks. In this act, the work policies are well-developed and organized for securing sound IRs.

(Interview no.: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, and 21)

The government formulated the labor act having Sections regarding the terms of jobs, employee status, certificates of appointment and identification card, service book, type of service book,

entries in the service book, registry of staff and tickets, card provision, cleanliness, ventilation and temperature, dust and smoke, waste and effluent treatment, overcrowding, illumination, potable water, latrines and urinals which are playing a vital role in bringing good IRs in the RMG industry.

(Interview no.: 1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 7, 9, 11, 12, 15, 17, 18, and 19)

The government agents formulate the rules and policies regarding the safety and health of the workplace, including building and machinery safety, fire precaution, fencing of machinery, working on or near moving machinery, cranes and other lifting machinery, hoists, and lifts, floors, stairs, and accessories. They also make rules and regulations for daily hours, rest or meal intervals, weekly hours, weekly holidays, weekly compensatory holidays, spread over, night shift, extra overtime allowances, casual leave, sick leave, annual wage leave, and festival holidays which are very much favorable in bringing up the congenial environment in the industry under study.

(Interview no.: 1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 7, 8, 10, 11, 12, 13, 15, 16, 18, and 21)

The punishment for non-compliance with the order of the labor court, the punishment for child and youth jobs, the penalty for unjust labor practices, the penalty for unlawful strike or lockout, the penalty for involvement in or incitement to go-slow, the penalty for general worker offenses, the penalty for other offenses ensure amicable industrial relations in the RMG industry of Bangladesh and such arrangement is formulated and monitored by the government.

(Interview no.: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, and 20)

Government agents are indeed more favorable to employers because most of the members of the parliament are businessmen. If management or employees call a strike or gherao then government calls the both parties and tries to solve the problems.....

(Interview no.:1,3,4,5,6,7,8,10,12,13,16,17,18,19,21,22 and 23)

..... government also took some steps for the proper practicing of labor laws and policies in the RMG industries. The government agents are very much helpful and friendly to the RMG industry of Bangladesh and as well playing more attentive roles in this sector.

(Interview no.: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22 and 23)

The government agents as the legislator, administrator, peacemaker, participant, adjudicator, and guardian oversee poor working conditions and negligence of labor rights in the industry under study.

(Interview no.: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22 and 23)

Establishing And Promoting A Congenial Working Environment: The environment means surroundings. Working environment means a location where a task is completed. A working environment means structures, systems, processes, and tools where people work together for achieving organizational objectives. The physical working environment includes work tools as well as air, noise, and light and psychological, how work is organized and well-being at work. It also requires laws, regulations; culture, finances, working relationships, labor, and environmental factors both internally, and externally that affect how many employees perform their job functions. Some of the participants of the interviews quoted,

The concerned government agents take necessary steps for having a safe, productive, constructive, and innovative work environment and it establishes good workplace relationships, decreases workplace attrition and job strife, improves staff satisfaction, improves outsiders' interest, and generates a desirable image for the business and creating a good working environment in the industry under study.

(Interview no.: 1, 2, 5, 6, 7, 8, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 17, 18, and 20)

.....the government agents ensure that everybody functions in the work environment to ensure sustainable socio-economic growth, not only for the employers' interest but also for the betterment of the workers.

(Interview no.: 1, 4, 6, 9, 11, 15, 17, 18, and 19)

The government, the ILO, and consumers operated together to strengthen working standards in apparel factories, and the workers' dissatisfaction over pay was therefore significantly stimulated through the introduction of the existing wage board award.

(Interview no.: 1, 2, 4, 5, 7, 9, 10, 13, 15, 16, 18, and 21)

In fact for having a sound industry the all parties like employees, employers, the government and buyers act and work positively for their respective benefits.

(Interview no.: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 10, 11, 12, 13, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 21, 22, and 23)

Government agents influence wages, workplace peace, health, safety, discipline, and dispute, and look to get better the well-being of employees in employment and build up their methods to protect workplace well-being in the industrial field.

(Interview no.:1,2,3,5, 6,7,8,9,10,11,12,13,14,15,16,17,18,19, 21 and 22)

In statutory minimum wages, the government is making every effort to ensure the full consultation and, insofar as possible, direct participation, on a basis of equality, of the social partners in the establishment and operation of minimum wage systems. It is also making every effort to establish and maintain the conditions for genuine social dialogue, a process which increases the chances that a minimum wage responds to the needs of the various parties and contributes to national development.....

(Interview no.: 1, 2, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, and 23)

Formulation and Practicing Freedom of Association: Freedom to organize is a liberty fundamental of IRs. Freedom of association is the privilege of common citizens of shared interest to establish their organizations for the advancement of their interests. The right to form an association is the freedom of employees and employers to establish and participate openly in respective bodies such as TUs, workers' organizations, and workers' councils or committees for the promotion and protection of job interests. The participants provided their opinions regarding their roles in the formation and practicing TUs in the RMG industry of Bangladesh,

The department of labor promotes TUs in the organization protected by the organization from the coercive control of the government, the employers, or other self-interest strongholds. This independence provides opportunities for both employees and employers to determine their right to life, dignity, and discrimination security. The workers feel a sense of pride being part of the TUs.....

(Interview no.: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22 and 23)

The government always shows respect to organizing associations for creating and enabling sound IRs (Hossain & Arefin, 2015). In 1998, the ILO adopted a Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work, describing the main conventions for respectable work which are promoted by government agents.

(Interview no.: 2,3,4,5,6,7,9,11,13,14,15,16,17,18,19, 20,22 and 23)

The government of Bangladesh recognizes freedom of association as a constitutional right of the people of Bangladesh. It is the main regulation regulating freedom of association and the right of factory workers to collective bargaining which helps the industry of ensuring sound IRs in the RMG industry of Bangladesh.

(Interview no.: 1,2,3,5,6,7,8,9,10,11,12,13,14,15,16,17,18,19,20, 21, 22 and 23)

Promoting Collective Bargaining: Workers' right to consult, harmonizes, and collectively agree with their boss over their basic privileges and desires is commonly referred to as collective bargaining. Collective bargaining is a procedure in which the selected employees and employers negotiate with each other on the terms and conditions of work. It helps to enter a mutual agreement that might change pay rates, working hours, working standards, workplace protection, health and social security, and share of productivity. Regarding the role of GAs in promoting collective bargaining in the RMG industry of Bangladesh, the participants' standpoints are as followed:

.....the government formulated an act where a dedicated chapter is included to promote and ensure collective bargaining. Accordingly, workers and employers can freely relate to efficiently negotiate work relations.

(Interview no.: 1,3,4,6,7,8,9,11,14,17,18,19,20,21 and 23)

The concerned authority of government keeps key attention regarding following the ILO Convention No. 154 regarding collective bargaining by the RMG industries to establish working practices and terms of jobs, to regulate ties between employers and employees, and to regulate relations between employers and employees or their associations.

(Interview no.: 3, 4, 5,9,10, 11, 12, 13, 15, 16, 18, 19,21,22, and 23)

.....the government agent always tried to empower all the parties i.e. TUs members and employers regarding their collective bargaining to strengthen themselves in their rights, equality, and sovereignty and create their ability to affect the setting of laws on the job and thereby obtain power over a significant element of their lives, namely their jobs to create a good industrial relation in the industry under study.

(Interview no.: 2, 5, 8, 10, 12, 14, 13,15,16,18, 20, and 22)

We think government agents are playing vital roles to ensure collective bargaining in the RMG industry to promote equal voice in negotiations between employers and workers. Government agents now a day could bring belief within the mind of all parties to deal issues with collective bargaining.....

(Interview no.: 1,3,4,5, 6,8,9,11,12,13,14,18,19,20 and 21)

.....particularly in the RMG industry of Bangladesh, all parties of the industry are allowing collective bargaining to establish a healthy working environment. They are trying to follow the standards of the ILO and buyers' codes of conduct to encourage collective bargaining

and ensure good work in the industry. Government agents are taking care of such an environment very consciously.

(Interview no.:1,2,3,6,7,8,9,10,11,12,13,14,15,16,17,18,19,20,21,22 and 23)

Dispute Resolution Initiatives: A dispute is a natural matter in human life. Certain conflicts between the staff and management will inevitably occur (Islam, 2018; Khan, 2013). A dispute may be defined as a conflict or dispute between two or more groups, owing to varying views, beliefs, attitudes, and values. Conflicts arise as a consequence of job contract provisions, working practices, pay structure, and financial priorities. The government formulated BLA 2006 where the dispute resolution process is mentioned and such initiatives of the government provide opportunities to its parties to solve the dispute that creates sound IRs in the RMG industry. The respondents of this study stated regarding dispute resolution,

There is a process of dispute resolution which is mentioned Bangladesh Labor Act. The process is Conciliation, Mediation, and Arbitration. Conciliation and mediation are the neutral entity offer support to the participants during talks or where discussions have achieved an impasse to aid them in achieving a compromise where Arbitration is a process by which a third party (whether a particular arbitrator, a board of arbitrators, or a court of arbitration) should not function as a court of law. The authority of the government always oversees such dispute resolution process and tries to bring up a mutual understanding among the parties.

(Interview no.:1,3,4,5,6,7,8,9,10,12,13,15,16,17,18,19,21,22 and 23)

As government agencies and law enforcement authorities, we arrange and organize all parties to solve any conflict created by any party. Firstly, we consider employees and employers to solve the conflict by themselves. If they fail then we try intervening in the matter and solving it. Then, if the parties are not satisfied we precede it to the arbitration process where the labor court plays its role as the judicial authority. Once the labor courts passed their order than as a law enforcement authority we implement the order of the court. It is a very important role played by the government in keeping sound industrial relations in every sector, particularly RMG.

(Interview no.: 2, 3, 4, 5, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 22, and 23)

We arrange a different training session on the premises of the factory with the owner, management, employees, trade union leaders, etc. for making them conscious of their rights, jurisdictions, and way of dealings. Such training is plying important roles of being aware of all parties and therefore initially conflicts are reduced.

(Interview no.: 2, 3, 4, 5, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 22, and 23)

We think that Bangladesh Labor Act provides important tools for minimizing any disputes through the intervention of various ways like *conciliation and mediation, arbitration, and labor adjudication*. This law provides another tool at the very initial stage of dispute such as a participation committee to initiatives to enhance mutual trust, understanding and cooperation between employers and workers to ensure the enforcement of labor laws, to encourage a sense of order, and to enforce and preserve protection, protection and working conditions for employees, and to take steps to improve the social system for employees and their families.

(Interview no.:1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8,9,10,11,12,13,14,15,16,17,18,19,20, 21,22 and 23)

Monitoring The Implementation of Buyers' Guidelines: The safety of workers in the workplace is expected all over the world but an accident may endanger the life of workers, and the safety of workers and negatively impact the livelihood of the workers and their families and those people who are living close to the industry. Buyers particularly foreign buyers specify some codes of conduct regarding the factories and the working environment which require some fulfillment of specific standards, accepted practices, prescribed rules, laws, and legislations, or the terms and conditions of a contract. The government agents take care of and oversee the guidelines provided by the buyers. Regarding this issue, the respondents stated that,

.....the government authorities always alert all the parties of the RMG industry to follow and maintain buyers' guidelines to make the place safe where they work. Government officials force the RMG industries to maintain occupational health and safety according to the ILO WHO's requirements. The government motivates the parties to do the best job performance.

(Interview no.:1, 3,4,5,6,7,8 ,10,11,12,13, 15,16,17,18,19, 21,22 and 23)

Government agents take feedback from the parties regarding the maintenance of the buyers' codes of conduct. We know that there are many types of hazards in manufacturing, and physical dangers such as burning, building collapse, etc. are closely connected to comply with structural and occupational health. After the Rana Plaza disaster government is trying to ensure all safety measures so that the industry will be hazard free.

(Interview no.:1, 2, 3,4,5,6,7,8,9,10 ,12,13,14,15,16,17,18,19 and 21)

Government officials are very much concerned regarding the workplace safety and health of the employees in the factories. The factories have to fulfill the Accord and Alliance guidelines to operate their industry. If there, is any problem or disappearance then the authorities take it very seriously and take necessary steps and actions.

(Interview no.:1, 2, 3, 4,5,6,7, 9,10,11,12,13,14,15, 17,18,19,20, 21, 22 and 23)

The government of the country is also playing more attentive roles in this sector by taking care in applying compliances like the construction must be according to the Accord and Alliance and in every organization, there must be fire doors so that the factory workers will be rescued easily if there any accident. The government bound the factories to introduce the compliance department in the factories.

(Interview no.:1, 3, 4,5,6,7,8,9,10,12,14,15,16,17,18,19,21 and 23)

Summary of The Key Themes and Sub-Themes: Concerning the in-depth interviews taken by the project director, there are six key themes emerged from the responses of the participants regarding the roles of government agents in industrial relations in the RMG industry of Bangladesh. Under these key themes, a wide range of sub-themes have been categorized as, practices of labor act, congenial working environment, promoting freedom of association, dispute resolution initiatives, following buyers’ codes of conduct, upholding collective bargaining relating to the roles of government agents in the industrial relations in the industry under study. The following table shows the sub-themes that emerged from the interview transcripts.

Table IV: Key and sub-theme relating to the roles of government agents in the IRs

Key Theme	Sub-theme
Practices of	✓ play roles as the legislator in practicing and monitoring the labor act
	✓ play roles as the administrator in practicing and monitoring the labor act
	✓ play roles as the peacemaker in practicing and monitoring the labor act
	✓ play roles as the participant in practicing and monitoring the labor act
	✓ play roles as the adjudicator in practicing and monitoring the labor act
	✓ play roles as the guardian in practicing and monitoring the labor act
	✓ observe legislation regarding the terms of the jobs
	✓ observe legislation regarding ensuring employee status
	✓ check certificates of appointment and identification card
	✓ observe about provision regarding the service book

<p>Labor Act</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ observe legislation regarding the registry of staff and ticket ✓ observe ID card provision regarding employees' presence in the factory ✓ watch about maintaining daily working hours ✓ try to ensure rest or meal intervals ✓ try to ensure weekly hours, weekly holidays, and weekly compensatory holidays ✓ monitor the provisions regarding overtime and night shift ✓ ensure extra overtime allowances ✓ ensure casual leave, sick leave, annual wage leave, and festival holidays ✓ impose punishment for child labor ✓ can give a penalty for unjust labor practices ✓ can give a penalty for unlawful strike or lockout ✓ can impose a penalty for involvement in or incitement to go-slow ✓ can impose a penalty for general worker offenses ✓ can impose a penalty for other offenses ensure an amicable industrial relations ✓ can ensure the regular wage payment
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ establishing partnerships among private industrial actors ✓ monitoring labor standards and labor rights ✓ play roles as social justice defender ✓ act as the resolving relationships ✓ try to achieve industrial balance ✓ try to ensure specific public capacities ✓ play roles in narrating and analyzing the crisis in the industry

<p>Congenial Working Environment</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ try to ensure cleanliness in the factory ✓ ensure proper ventilation and temperature ✓ ensure dust and smoke-free factory ✓ ensure waste-free and arrange effluent treatment ✓ trying for maintaining an overcrowding-free workplace ✓ ensure illumination in the factory ✓ ensure potable water, latrines, and urinals ✓ ensure building and machinery safety ✓ ensure fire precaution ✓ ensure fencing of machinery ✓ ensure working on or near moving machinery ✓ ensure cranes and other lifting machinery ✓ ensure hoists and lifts, floors, stairs, and accessories ✓ motivate the parties to do the best job performance ✓ improving the social system ✓ consider outsiders' interest
<p>Promoting Freedom of Association</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ force to follow ILO Conventions 87 ✓ motivate workers to feel a sense of pride in being part of the trade unions ✓ promoting freedom of association as a constitutional right ✓ motivate to show respect to organize an association ✓ formulate regulations regarding freedom of association
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ trying to establishment and operation of minimum wage systems ✓ ensure the right to life, dignity, and discrimination security

<p>Upholding Collective Bargaining</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ promoting equal voice in negotiations ✓ creating mutual understanding among the parties ✓ give suggestions for cooperation between employers and workers ✓ force to follow ILO Convention No. 154 regarding collective bargaining ✓ force to follow ILO Convention 98 regarding collective bargaining
<p>Dispute Resolution Initiatives</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ play roles as administrators in industrial disputes resolution ✓ play roles as umpires in industrial disputes resolution ✓ play roles as conciliators in industrial disputes resolution ✓ play roles as arbitrators in industrial disputes resolution ✓ play predominant roles in various tripartite bodies ✓ play roles as the mediator in industrial disputes ✓ arranging effective facilities for negotiation
<p>Follows Buyers' Codes of Conduct</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ introducing social compliance ✓ take feedback from the parties regarding the maintenance of the buyers' codes of conduct ✓ can force to fulfill the Accord and Alliance guidelines ✓ try to introduce the BCoC for the hazard-free industry. ✓ government officials force RMG to follow the ILO and WHO's requirements ✓ government agents are trying to ensure all safety measures so that the industry will be hazard free ✓ government agents bound the factories to introduce the compliance department in the factories ✓ force to maintain buyers' guidelines to make the RMG industry safe

Taking into consideration the above claims and quotations from the participants of the field study, it can identify the roles of GAs in IRs in the RMG industry of Bangladesh. Remarkably, all participants recognized GAs' support in labor laws practice, their involvement in a sound working environment, upholding freedom of association, buyers' importance in RMG, and cooperation from all actors of IRs in the RMG industry of Bangladesh. They also recognized the roles of GAs in collective bargaining. Moreover, all participants recognized the appreciation of the GAs for dispute resolution. The participants opined that for sound IRs in RMG of Bangladesh, GAs' pressures are important. The strain from the GAs has moved to adequate RMG function. With the significant increase in the discourse of legitimating based on the GAs, the RMG industry of Bangladesh is getting improved situations for sound IRs.

Discussion of Findings and Implications of The Study

From this study, it is found that along with the employers, trade unions, and buyers, there is a third player who has direct relations with the IRs in the RMG industry of Bangladesh and the player is a government agent. From the field study, the researcher found that one of the industrial parties, the government has many agencies, each of which has its discrete purpose and function. This party is not single or uniform rather it works as an open system such findings are similar to the earlier findings by Hyman, 2015. From the in-depth interviews of this study, the researcher found that in the IRs in the RMG industry of Bangladesh, the government agents capture the interactions of all the institutions that carry out the will of the government for bringing betterment of the industry and its stakeholders and such finding is described by Al Faruque (2009). The government agents are also trying to ensure a socio-legal environment within the industrial activities. The findings of this study also outline that government agents are the protector of labor rights by promoting the formation of governance throughout the whole workplace issues.

In the field study, the participants provided their opinions that the government agents are playing their roles as the protector of the IRs in the RMG industry for social justice, and such findings are supported by the previous research work conducted by Hossain and Arefin (2015). After analyzing the interviews, it is found that the government is the interventionist machinery for guiding and regulating the passions, emotions, and behaviors of individuals, and standardizing human relationships which is also supported by previous studies conducted by Kium (2020). They are also responsible to settle the relations based on fundamental human rights so that the majority of employees can share the social progress and economic development outcomes to achieve the industrial balance. The study conducted by William and Adam-Smith (2006) described government agents as the regulator and providers of the socio-legal environment within which industrial activities take place. It is thus the mediator in industrial disputes involving the employer or his agents and the employee or his agents. From the theme of the

interviews, the researcher finds the role of the government agents in the RMG industry of Bangladesh.

This study finds that government agents play a central role in the development of industrial relations systems particularly in the field under study by implementing and systematizing structural reform through a collection of specific public capacities, narrating and analyzing the crisis in IRs, solving the joint action problems of employers and TUs, and predicting and establishing partnerships among industrial actors though it is necessary to not neglect the explicit repressive force of the government and such findings supported by Hayter and Lee (2018). Ansary and Barua (2015) described in their study that government agents influence wages, workplace peace, health, and safety, discipline and dispute, and look to get better the well-being of employees in employment and the researcher got similar findings from the interviews of the participants of this project work.

Therefore, the findings of this study show that IRs of the RMG industry of Bangladesh is being positively influenced by the roles of the government and its agents. Moreover, the government is interested in playing its roles according to the BLA 2006 that facilitates harmonious relationships among the parties of the IRs in the identical sector. The support provided by the government agents to the employees, TUs, employers, and buyers are creating a positive attitude toward them. The government agent as one of the important actors in IRs in the RMG industry of Bangladesh is playing an effective role in mediating and settling industrial disputes in the sector under study (Islam & Asaduzzaman 2015). This study found that some initiatives by the government agents are keeping a significant impact on the IRs because of introducing 4-week training on IRs-related courses such as labor law, labor administration, and its functions, various labor conventions, and issues regarding domestic, and international industrial relations courses, etc. such finding is supported by Al Faruque (2009). The findings of the study by Afrin (2014) provide similar findings to this study that the government agents also arrange various programs and initiatives for the concerned parties regarding the workers' rights and responsibilities, productivity, occupational health and safety issues maintained by the employers in their factories according to the codes of conduct prescribed by the buyers and government as well. It also provides guidelines to employers to improve the living standards of the workers. Government agents are monitoring whether the workers are receiving regular wages or whether child laborers are working, whether the firefighting system is in place, and whether the organization has a TUs or a canteen system. Moreover, the government has taken steps to settle disputes and cases of different parties through 7 labor courts in the country.

Remarkably, all participants recognized government agents' support in labor laws practice, their involvement in the sound working environment, upholding freedom of association, buyers' importance in RMG, and cooperation from all parties of industrial relations in the RMG industry

of Bangladesh. They also recognized the roles of government agents in collective bargaining. Moreover, all participants recognized the appreciation of the government agents for dispute resolution. The participants opined that for sound industrial relations in RMG of Bangladesh, government agents' pressures are important. The strain from the government agents has moved to adequate RMG function. With the significant increase in the discourse of legitimating based on the government agents, the RMG industry of Bangladesh is getting improved situations for sound IRs.

As far as the researchers are concerned, this research will be the first-ever effort in Bangladesh to investigate the roles of the government agents towards the parties of IRs in the RMG industry of Bangladesh so this study will be a better understanding of the roles of the government agents in IRs in the RMG industry of Bangladesh. This study contributes to the literature on IRs particularly in the RMG sector of Bangladesh because the researcher during the literature review has identified the roles of government agents and then conducted in-depth interviews with the varied parties of the sector and found their roles in practice which the important contribution to the knowledge of IRs. The outcome of the study will have an important policy impact on the RMG industry in Bangladesh and issues related to IRs as the study has identified the influential roles of government agents towards the parties involved resulting in a situation of IRs in the RMG industry in Bangladesh. The outcome of the study is useful to various stakeholders involved with maintaining a pattern of IRs in RMG sector for creating a positive image regarding the roles of government agents which can help to boost far better relationships between the government and the rest of the parties. The findings of this study attempt to nullify the claim that government agents are very much careless and inattentive to the sector under study. The findings of the study will encourage the stakeholders of the sector towards putting their trust in the roles of TUs and GAs, and consequently, the stakeholders involved will come forward to establish the rights of workers, make workers aware of their rights, ensure collective bargaining and labor welfare, and maintain better employer-employee relations. Moreover, this study will allow the parties involved to undertake steps for achieving preparedness in the future for ensuring IRs and thereby making a harmonious working place for all. In addition, this study will be helpful for concerned academics and practitioners, particularly not only in Bangladesh but throughout the world. It is also presumed that the findings of this project can be used for the same and similar to another context in the future. It is also a good source to identify whether the government agents addressing and maintaining the Bangladesh Labor Act in the workplace and interactions of all parties of IRs in the field under study.

Limitations and Further Study Direction

The major drawback of this study is that primary data was drawn from a narrow sample size along a confined geographic area; thus, there are some limitations in the generalizability of the research findings in the context of the whole nation. Another noteworthy limitation of this study

is the sampling method used; where random sampling was not used rather convenience sampling was used to collect the data for this study. Due to the non-availability of NVivo software, the manual method was used for certain data analyses from the interview. In addition, to conduct this study the researchers used qualitative methods only. Finally, the results of this study might not explain the same problem from a different perspective even in the same industry in a different economy as well the conclusions reached in the study may not have universal application.

The next researchers may consider the wide area of the sector to get an overall picture of the industry. Further research needs to conduct using a larger sample size and applying a random sampling technique. In the next, researchers may use more authentic data analysis tools and techniques like NVivo software. In addition, in this study, only the qualitative method has been used, in the future quantitative methods or mixed-methods might be initiated to understand the more realistic scenario of the field under study.

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