

Bangladesh garment workers' safety pact

September 1, 2021

In news—Major global retailers have agreed to extend a health and safety agreement with garment workers and factory owners in Bangladesh.

About the new pact

- **The International Accord for Health and Safety in the Textile and Garment Industry, a legally-binding pact** – came into effect from September 1, and will be **valid for two years**.
- Many leading brands including H&M and Inditex and global unions including IndustriALL and UNI Global Union have signed the agreement.
- The new agreement is being managed by the Ready-Made Garments Sustainability Council (RSC).
- The agreement maintains the legally binding provision for companies and most importantly the scope has been expanded to other countries and other provisions, encompassing general health and safety.
- The new accord maintains respect for freedom of association, independent administration and implementation, a high-level of transparency, safety committee training and worker awareness program, and a credible, independent complaints mechanism.
- The new accord will also set in place an **optional arbitration process** to implement its terms in a streamlined manner.

Previous Accord

- The pre-existing Accord on Fire and Building Safety (Bangladesh Accord) was put in place by IndustriALL, UNI and 17 textile and garment brands and the accord was the

- first legally binding agreement.
- It was brought in to ensure and improve the safety of workers.
 - The accord made it mandatory for brands to set basic standards of workplace, minimum wages, independent factory inspections, public reports on the factories, constant repairs and renovations.
 - The agreement signatories decided to continue the 2013 Accord for three more years in 2018, until May 31, 2021.
 - The 2018 accord involved brands to conduct independent safety inspections, remediation programmes, establish safety training programmes, disclosure of inspections reports, setting up complaints mechanisms, safely implement the right to refuse unsafe work and take corrective actions plans.
 - It was further extended for three more months until August 31, 2021.

Garment sector & accidents in Bangladesh-

- According to the International Labour Organisation (ILO), the ready-made garment sector accounts for 80 per cent of Bangladesh's export earnings and employs about 4.2 million people.
- It is estimated that over 11,000 workers suffer fatal accidents and a further 24,500 die from work related diseases across all sectors each year in Bangladesh.
- It is also estimated that a further 8 million workers suffer injuries at work – many of which result in permanent disability.