

## **Int'l meet on future of RMG industry today**

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Local garment industry leaders will meet international buyers today (Monday) through an international conference, dubbed "Forum on the Future" in the capital to discuss the prospects of the country's textiles and garments industry in the post-quota period.

Sources at the BGMEA said it is the most important international conference as international buyers will discuss on the country's factory compliance, since it became a major issue following the catastrophic accident at Spectrum Sweater Factory in Savar on April 11 last killing more than 60 workers.

Local garment industry leaders said they would try to portray a positive picture before the international buyers since local industry is in back foot due to the building collapse in Savar.

Over 150 participants including national and international government and trade union representatives, the World Bank and the International Finance Corporation are expected to attend the Conference, said a media release of UNDP.

Major global retailers and brands such as Gap, Marks & Spencer, and Levi Strauss, will join Bangladesh garment industry leaders and government officials at the conference. It will be jointly organised by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the MFA Forum which brings this diverse group together for the first time.

MFA Forum is a group of brands and retailers, international institutions, trade unions and NGOs formed in early 2004 to better understand the implications of the end of the MFA, particularly for workers and communities, and to explore how best to promote collaborative approaches to mitigating negative impacts and taking advantage of new opportunities.

"With the world clothing and textile industry in turmoil, countries like Bangladesh that are highly dependent on the industry for employment and export earnings, must develop strategies to stabilise and grow their industry. This conference provides a springboard for all concerned," said Neil Kearney, Board Director of the Ethical Trading Initiative and General Secretary of the International Textiles Garments and Leather Workers Industry.

Commerce Secretary Siddiqur Rahman Choudhury, will inaugurate the conference.

Garment is the highest export earner product for the country; it accounted for 68 percent of the total export earnings.

The export earnings of Bangladesh from garment products stood at \$5,686.09 million in 2003-04, compared to \$4,912.09 million in 2002-03.

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