



**REMARKS BY U.S. AMBASSADOR MARCIA BERNICAT AT
PRESS CONFERENCE ON BGMEA-BUFT JOURNALISM
STUDY TOUR THROUGH THE INTERNATIONAL VISITOR
LEADERSHIP PROGRAM (IVLP)**

**BGMEA Headquarters, Dhaka
May 28, 2018**

Mr. Md. Siddiqur Rahman, BGMEA President;

Mr. Muzaffar U. Siddique, Chairman, BUFT Board of Trustees;

Mr. Mohammed Nasir, Vice President of Finance;

Mr. Monjurul Ahsan Bulbul, Editor-in-Chief and Chief Executive Officer, Ekushey Television;

Mr. Shyamal Dutta, Editor, the Bhorer Kagoj;

Mr. Syed Ishtiaque Reza, Editor-in-Chief, Gazi TV;

BGMEA-BUFT Journalism Fellows;

Members of the press:

I am excited to announce the U.S. Department of State's International Visitor Leadership Program entitled "Economic and Labor Reporting," and I want to thank the BGMEA and BGMEA's University of Fashion and Technology for partnering with the U.S. Embassy to make this important exchange possible.

This International Visitor Leadership Program—or IVLP for short—will allow the 11 Bangladeshi participants to travel to Washington, D.C. and New York to meet with policymakers, journalists, apparel industry leaders, labor rights organizations, and consumer rights organizations.

IVLP is one of our most prestigious State Department exchange programs for professionals. Every year the U.S. Embassy partners with the private sector and NGOs throughout Bangladesh to design IVLP proposals and send dozens of professionals to the U.S. for this exciting learning opportunity. When these BGMEA-BUFT Journalism Fellows returns



from the program, they will also join a global network of alumni who work every day to improve their professional sectors, communities, countries, and the world.

In addition to learning about U.S. journalism methods and best practices, my sincere hope for this trip is that the Fellows experience firsthand why the United States cares about workplace safety and labor rights issues as a global issue. Factory safety and labor rights are not just a priority for the U.S. government; they are a priority for our legislators, civil society, U.S. businesses and, more importantly, for U.S. consumers. Respecting workers' rights is not just the right thing to do; it is important to ensuring free and fair trade and investment around the world. No one should gain an unfair competitive advantage by treating workers unfairly or not paying them a living wage. The U.S. Embassy's efforts to improve workplace safety and labor rights, which includes a broad range of programming and outreach, are derived from the priorities of our stakeholders in the United States. I encourage the Fellows to ask hard questions and to leave any pre-conceived notions about journalism and U.S. policy on the plane.

The IVLP program will also be an opportunity to explain the progress that Bangladesh has made on workplace safety, especially with the support of buyer-led initiatives like the Accord and the Alliance. Bangladesh's RMG sector is much safer than in 2013 when the Rana Plaza disaster occurred, and Bangladesh and BGMEA must do a better job at marketing the dramatic improvements that are bringing the sector up to world-class standards. However, we must all recognize that there is still work to be done on factory and building safety, that we must continue our efforts to ensure remediated factories stay safe, and that new workers are properly trained on safety practices. I urge BGMEA and the Government of Bangladesh to come to a quick resolution on the Accord and Alliance's extensions in Bangladesh. Delays in approving their extensions will send a negative signal to buyers and consumers that Bangladesh is not committed to workplace safety.

I would also like to take this opportunity to thank BGMEA for its work to propose significant reforms the Bangladesh Labor Act and the EPZ Labor Law. Recent proposals that have been discussed are movement in the right direction, but I call on BGMEA and the Government of Bangladesh to do more to truly meet international standards, as recommended by the International Labor Organization (ILO). BGMEA and the Government of Bangladesh are at a critical juncture as Bangladesh prepares to graduate from least developed country status in



Embassy of the United States of America
Dhaka, Bangladesh
Public Affairs Section

2024, having already met all three criteria required for this important step. Ahead of the International Labor Conference on May 28 and the Sustainability Compact on June 25, I encourage BGMEA and the Government of Bangladesh to seize the moment and resolve the long-standing labor rights concerns now, so that Bangladesh can focus on preparing for its future as a middle income country and, eventually, a developed country.

Thank you again for the opportunity to speak to all of you today and congratulations to the BGMEA – BUFT IVLP Fellows. I wish them much success on their IVLP program in the United States.

Thank you.

**As prepared for delivery*