

Garment factory blaze kills 104 in Bangladesh

DHAKA, BANGLADESH - More than 100 workers were killed when a fierce blaze tore through a busy garment factory in Bangladesh, forcing people to leap from high windows to escape the choking smoke and flames.

Firefighters battled for several hours to control the fire, which broke out in the ground-floor warehouse of the nine-storey Tazreen Fashion factory, 30km north of the capital Dhaka on Saturday evening (24 November).

Survivors told how panicked staff, mostly women, desperately tried to escape the blazing building, which made clothes for international brands including Dutch chain C&A and the Hong Kong-based Li & Fung company.

"There were more than 1,000 workers trapped in the factory," one worker who gave her name only as Romesa, 42, told local media from her hospital bed.

"I jumped from a window on the fourth floor and found myself on the third-story roof of another building. Several people fell out of the window and died," she said.

The operations director of the fire brigade, Major Mahbub, who uses one name, told *AFP* that the death toll had been lowered on Sunday morning (25 November) from 121 to 104.

"There was some double counting as different fire teams were working on different floors," he said.

"But now we have a total of 104 dead bodies including several who jumped to their deaths. Most bodies were found on the second floor. Most died of suffocation," he said.

The owner of the Tazreen factory, Delwar Hossain, told *AFP* that the cause of the fire was not yet known but he denied his premises were unsafe.

"It is a huge loss for my staff and my factory. This is the first time we have ever had a fire at one of my seven factories," he said, confirming that the premises made clothes for Li and Fung of Hong Kong and C&A.

The cause was not immediately known but fires as a result of short circuits and shoddy electrical wiring are common in Bangladeshi garment factories, which use cheap labour to produce clothes shipped to Western countries.

Such tragedies are not confined to Bangladesh. A blaze in a Pakistan garment factory fire in September killed 289 workers and injured 110 more.

Of the workers who were injured, dozens suffered disabling injuries and about 2,000 other workers have lost their livelihoods.

Two of the three Pakistan factory's owners are facing murder charges and have been sent to jail on remand.

Also in Bangladesh, at least 13 people were killed after a flyover under construction collapsed in the south-eastern port city of Chittagong.

Witnesses said more than 50 construction workers and vegetable hawkers had gathered near a pond under the bridge when three concrete girders crashed to the ground.

Armed with sticks and stones, angry crowds attacked the site offices of the construction company, forcing police to fire tear gas and use batons to disperse them, police said.

Source: *AFP* via I-Net Bridge

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