

Six dead in Bangladesh factory collapse

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At least six workers are dead after a building extension under construction collapsed yesterday afternoon in the city of Mongla in Bangladesh. According to the *Daily Star*, workers had half-finished pouring concrete for the roof when the structure caved in at around 1 p.m.

The four-storey building was part of the military-owned Mongla Cement Factory established by the Sena Kalyan Sangstha or armed forces welfare association. The plant is one of the largest enterprises owned by the association.

Rescue operations involving the fire service, civil defence department, coast guard and paramilitary troops from the country's border guard continued into the night in an effort to free workers trapped in the tangle of scaffolding, concrete blocks and debris.

Three of the dead have been named: Maharuf Hawlader, Amir Akandi and Al Amin. The number of injured and those still trapped is unclear as the number of people working on the site is unknown. Many of the workers were casual day labourers who are among the most oppressed layers of the working class.

Police officer Nizamul Hoque Molla, cited by Australia's SBS News, said that rescuers had pulled more than 50 people out alive from the ruins. Mashhurul Haque, a doctor at the Khulna Medical College and Hospital, said that 24 injured workers had been brought to his hospital. One, who was in a critical condition, had been transferred to the capital, Dhaka.

Firefighter Mizanur Rahman said that at least 35 were still trapped in the wreckage. Local residents and survivors estimated that more than 100 people were working on the site at the time of the collapse.

District administration official Mohammad Abdus Samad told France 24: "There are more bodies inside debris. We're trying to recover the living first." The sixth body was removed last night at about 11 p.m.

Samad said that a nine-member committee had been

formed to investigate the incident and would report its findings in seven working days. Like many other investigations into industrial accidents, ferry sinkings and other disasters, this investigation will be nothing more than a cover-up.

The factory construction was being carried out by ITCL, a local company, which was acting as the local agent for the chief contractor, China National Building Material Co. Ltd. ITCL site engineer Rafiqul Islam refused to answer media questions about the cause of the roof collapse.

An official with the military-owned Sena Kalyan Sangstha suggested to the *Daily Star* that "the scaffolding for the roof might have been weak causing the collapse." Injured worker Masud Kazi pointed to the same issue, telling the newspaper that there could have been problems in setting up the scaffolding.

Bangladesh is notorious for shoddy construction and the non-enforcement of building standards.

More than 1,120 people, most of them garment workers, were killed in April 2013 when the eight-storey Rana Plaza complex suddenly collapsed as a result of substandard construction, in one of the world's worst industrial disasters.

The scale of the tragedy provoked widespread popular anger threatening the country's highly profitable garment export industry. The government, along with US and European multi-national corporations that source their products in Bangladesh, feigned concern and staged an elaborate campaign supposedly to ensure that similar disasters would not happen again.

US and European retailers supported by two international trade unions—the Swiss-based UNI Global Union and IndustriALL Global Union—established the Bangladesh Accord Foundation (BAF) to inspect and expose dangerous construction and working conditions in the country's garment factories.

The BAF inspection system is largely cosmetic. It will inspect only 1,500 of the country's 5,000 garment factories and has no power to force remedial action. Factories are only inspected if listed by a BAF signatory company.

As of this month, nearly two years after the Rana Plaza collapse, initial inspections had taken place at about 1,250 factories. Follow-up fire, electrical and structural inspections have only taken place at 227 factories. Another 263 inspections have been conducted in factories with "major structural concerns."

As the latest building collapse demonstrates, the problem of unsafe, shoddy construction extends well beyond the garment export industry. In 2013, the country had an estimated 200 qualified building inspectors to examine millions of factories and many other structures.



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