

Bangladesh: 7 Failed To Check Doomed Factories

Farid Hossain, Associated Press

DHAKA, Bangladesh (AP) — Bangladesh has suspended seven inspectors it accuses of negligence for renewing the licenses of [garment factories](#) [1] in a building that collapsed in April, killing more than 1,100 people, a top Labor Ministry official said Monday.

The official, Mikail Shipar, said a ministry investigation found that the inspectors never even visited the five factories housed in the shabbily built eight-story Rana Plaza building. He said one of the factories, EtherTex, had been operating without any license from the factory inspection department since 2008, while the others were licensed through 2013.

At least 1,129 people died when the building in the Dhaka suburb of Savar collapsed April 24, a day after cracks in the building prompted authorities to issue an evacuation order.

Shipar said the ministry's report was preliminary, and that if the accusations are proven the inspectors, all mid-level officials, will lose their jobs.

Inspectors are required to visit factories before issuing licenses, but "in the cases of these five factories, the inspectors renewed the licenses sitting at their desks," Shipar said.

The number of factories in Bangladesh has soared in recent years to more than 240,000, while their safety is checked by only 50 government inspectors who issue operating licenses, said Obaidul Islam, a senior official at the office of the Chief Inspector of Factories. Islam said the factories include 3,500 garment factories that employ more than 3 million workers, mostly women from impoverished villages.

"There are too few inspectors for too many factories," Islam said.

Shipar said three of the suspended inspectors were also involved in renewing the license of a garment factory where 112 people were killed in a fire in November. He gave no details about whether the inspectors are accused of wrongdoing in that license renewal.

Another government probe, formed by the Home Ministry, blamed the use of poor construction materials and unauthorized generators for the collapse of the Rana Plaza building.

Sohel Rana, the owner of Rana Plaza, and five executives and owners of the factories it housed have been arrested and face possible charges of negligence and violation of factory and building codes.

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After weeks of questioning by police they have been jailed pending formal charges and a trial.

It is still unclear what charges will be brought against the six suspects. If they are accused of causing deaths through negligence they could be sentenced to life imprisonment, said Khandker Mainuddin, a senior Home Ministry official.

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