



“The Nischintapur factory fire is the worst in Bangladesh's industrial history, one already strewn with innumerable deaths and injuries, caused by callous indifference and a reckless disregard for workers' safety”

# **GARMENT FACTORY FIRE**

**TASREEN FASHIONS LTD, NISCHINTAPUR, SAAVAR. BANGLADESH**

**24 NOVEMBER 2012**



**AIN O SALISH KENDRA**

Investigation Unit Report

## INITIAL REPORT COMPILED BY ASK INVESTIGATION UNIT

The recent incident in the garments factory could be one of the largest tragedies to hit the sector in the history of Bangladesh.

On the 24th November 2012, a garments factory named Tazreen Fashion Limited, a sister company of Tuba Group (Suppliers to Walmart, Carrefour and Ikea) in Nischintapur, Savar was on fire at approximately 6.00pm.

This fire continued till the early morning of 25th November. It was a nine storey building; the floors were burnt entirely by the furious fire.

A female worker, Ms Ashura (20), eye witness and survivor, who was working at the second floor of this factory, said when it was near 6.00 pm, fire alarms were ringing. She with other workers who tried to get down from the second floor but the stairway was dark and full of smoke and the electricity supply had been shut down. That is why; they were unable to go downstairs. Finally, she was able to leave through a broken window on the south side of the factory which opened to the roof of a two storied building beside the factory. She also said that only a few number of workers were able to get out through that window and only some of them were able to get to that floor of the factory but most workers were unable and she assumed that all of them had died. Majority of those workers were women. She also observed that fire was climbing from the ground floor to the upper floors, leaving workers trapped.

None of the floors had emergency exits. Another worker claimed that the main gates for the other floors were locked, they were trapped. An eye witness stated that he has observed fifty to sixty local vans which were used to take the bodies of the deceased from the factory and each van transporting four to five of the victims' bodies.

### Number of Deaths and Injuries

According to field investigation:

117 workers died

64 were identified and 53 were unidentified.

64 identified bodies, 43 were female and 21 were male workers.

Due to severe burning, it was impossible to determine whether the remaining victims were male or female.

111

Officially  
reported deaths

102

Charred bodies  
found inside  
factory

59

Bodies burnt  
beyond  
recognition

6

People died  
when they  
jumped outside  
the Windows

On 2nd December 2012, there were 55 separate guardians who were still searching for their loved ones. The total number of deaths is suspected to increase.

Witness Statements | ASK Investigation Team

**Md. Jahangir Alam, Male (25), Worker | Eye witness**

According to Jahangir there were 2,500 workers present at the factory on the night of the incident. He had been working on the fifth floor, when he heard about the fire he went to the second floor where he had been misinformed by the production manager, Mr Rana. Jahangir and another colleague eventually escaped through the window of the conference room on the third floor.

**Md. Nazmul, Male (23), Sewing Operator | Eye Witness**

Nazmul said that after being surrounded by black smoke in the dark, he got down to the ground floor quickly but then found the main gate locked as well as on other floors which is why many workers were unable to leave the factory and died on the spot.

He also estimated that there were 80 deaths in the 2nd floor only that the total number of deaths would be above 200. He also mentioned that there was fire prevention equipment on each floor but staff were not trained to operate it.

**Mrs Rashida Begum | Wife of deceased - Atikur Rahman | Nougan**

On the evening of the incident, Atikur Rahman, phoned his wife on her mobile, he told her:

“The factory is on fire, I will not be alive. The gate is locked and I cannot get down from the floor”.

She also wept, “for the last two days I have searched for my husband everywhere but I could not find any information, what can I do now?”.

**Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH)**

DMCH authority informed ASK that there were 13 injured workers receiving treatment at the Orthopedic, Casualty and Intensive Care Unit. Md. Abdullah Al Mamun Talukder, Assistant Commissioner & Executive Magistrate said that they handed over 52 unidentified bodies of the deceased which to the Anjuman E Mofidul Islam Organisation (volunteer organisation).

**Chief of the Investigation team formed by Ministry of Home Affairs of government | Mr. Moin Uddin Khondoker**

Stated that there were no emergency exit stairways and the inside stairway had been removed from the inside of ground floor. This made it impossible to exit from the ground floor

## **Fire Service & Civil Defense**

**Mr. M. Abdus Salam | Director | Mr. Anwar Hossain | Senior Officer**

According to both representatives of the fire service, the fire team reached the place of incident at 7.20pm, their service was hampered by the surrounding congested and narrow path way of the residential area and insufficient water supply.

The team provided a breakdown of the bodies of the deceased which were recovered from the corresponding floors between the 24th to the 25th of November 2012.

2nd Floor - 69

3rd Floor - 21

4th Floor - 6

5th Floor - 4

They also stated that the incendiary event started from the north side of the ground floor which was stacked with materials and fabrics, which could have been a contributing factor for the spread, however, the fire service had not yet been able to determine the reasons for the fire.

## **Police Station | ASI Khairuzzaman, Duty Officer of Ashulia Thana**

The Case No: 62/873, Date: 25 Nov, 12, Time: 16.05, Section: 304-A/34, 323, 325, 436, of Penal Code.

On Sunday midnight, sub-inspector Khairul Islam, filed the case at Ashulia Thana (police station) after receiving evidence that the fire at Tazreen Fashion factory in Ashulia was pre-planned and not an accident. Md. Mostofa Kamal from Ashulia Thana was appointed as the investigating inspector of this case.

## **ASK Comment**

After the initial investigation, ASK did not find any evidence that can prove there are any conspiracies behind this incident. But it is clear that incendiary had begun from the ground floor. After considering the eye witness statements and the circumstances at the ground floor and surrounding area, it seems there is a high probability that there could have been an electrical problem, such as a short-circuit from the high voltage electric transformer, generator or electric supply mains on the ground floor.

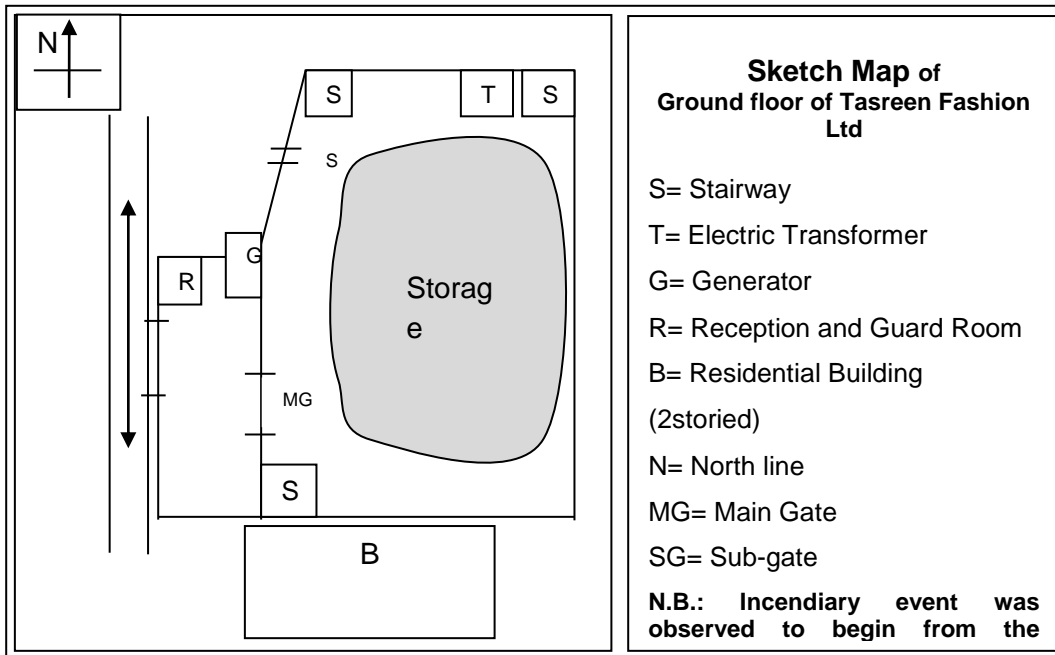
Primarily, it is assumed that negligence and insufficient fire defense facilities are the main causes behind these careless murders.

To determine the actual causes and facts behind this incident, the investigation needs to be undertaken by high expertise investigators and forensics. The case should be followed through, bringing the employers and managerial body in front of the justice system.



## KEY POINTS

- The factory only had three narrow staircases for the workers; the rest of the staircases had been removed from the inside of ground floor.
- There were no emergency exits or stairways.
- There were insufficient fire defense materials, most of them were unused. Most of the workers were unable to use those materials.
- There were no automated fire defense systems.
- There were no sufficient water sources inside or outside of the factory.
- The ground floors were being using as a storage facility which was unplanned.
- Two high voltage electricity transformers are take place at the ground floor, which is very risky.
- The size of main entrance was not suitably sized for the number of employees and size of the building.
- The front entrance and other side entrances of the factory were very congested.



A brief description of ground floor of Tasreen Fashion Ltd, Nischintapur, Savar:

- There are three stairways, including one which is situated at the south-west part of ground floor, another two are situated at the north-west and north-east corner of the ground floor.
- All stairways were removed inside of the ground floor.
- There is only one main exit and entrance way from ground floor.
- There is also a narrow sub-gate at ground floor, but all the time it's kept lock.
- There are two high voltage electric transformer are take place near beside north-east stairway.
- All the electric cables are connected with those transformers.
- There is a high powerful generator, which is take place at the mid position attached with west side wall of the ground floor.
- Whole the ground floor were using as storage of spin, fabric and other raw materials.
- The stuck of spin and fabric was much closed to high voltage transformer.

# WRIT PETITION FILED

**Writ Petition No. 15693 of 2012**

**Order dated 26<sup>th</sup> November 2012**

## Issue

A fire outbreak resulted in the death of 110 workers in Tazreen Fashion Limited at Ashulia, Savar, Dhaka. **ASK** along with **BLAST**, **Nijera Kori** and **BRAC** filed writ petition against the failure of the respondents to ensure effective enforcement of applicable laws on work-place safety in particular regarding prevention of deaths and injuries of workers from fire in garments manufacturing factories. Court gave following directions.

- Issued Rule calling upon the respondents to show cause within four weeks as to why they should not be directed to prosecute and punish people responsible for the fire.
- Directed BGMEA to submit report within two months including a list of garment factories across the country, and a report on whether the authorities of the factories comply with the relevant laws to run those, and what steps they have taken to save the workers from fires.
- Directed the Chairman of National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) and Chief Executive of Bangladesh Environmental Lawyers Association (BELA) to suggest names of some eminent persons within 10 days for constituting a probe committee into this incident.
- Directed the government to explain what steps it has taken to implement the HC directives issued in 2001 in Writ Petition no. 6070/1997 to ensure safety and security of garment workers and to form an inspection committee to monitor whether the garments authorities abide by the relevant laws in running their factories.
- Directed authorities of Tuba Groups and Tazreen Fashions Ltd, to state in detail what steps have been taken regarding compensations for the workers killed and the injured, and what measures they have taken to ensure treatment of the injured staffers.

1. **ASK** [Ain o Salish Kendra](#) – Legal and Human Rights Organisation
2. **BLAST** [Bangladesh Legal Aid and Service Trust](#) - Provide free legal aid and to undertake public interest litigation and advocacy activities to ensure that opportunities for securing justice are not denied to any person for any reason.
3. **BRAC** [Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee](#) Encourage policy makers, service providers, resource holders, civil society and community to take initiatives in favor of the poor, marginalised and the affected
4. **Nijera Kori** ["We do it ourselves"](#) Nijera Kori believes in the enormous power of collective action. *Even in our work, we continuously strengthen bonds partners to effectively leverage use the collective force in our work.*

## PROBE ENQUIRIES

- Five committees are investigating the deadly blaze at Ashulia, according to government sources.
- One Probe from Ministry of Home Affairs. Committee chief Additional Secretary Main Uddin Khandaker stated that they were looking into the reasons of the fire and whether the factory authorities were guilty of negligence, he added "We're on the side of the workers. If the factory authorities are found guilty of negligence in our investigation, they would be arrested and brought to justice". ([BDNEWS24](#))

## LEGAL PROCEEDINGS

- On Sunday midnight, Khairul Islam, a sub-inspector of Ashulia police, filed the case at Ashulia Thana (police station) after receiving evidence that the fire at Tazreen Fashion factory in Ashulia was pre-planned and not an accident.
- A hearing was held in the high court on Monday, 26<sup>th</sup> of November where the High Court gave an order for the Writ petition filed by the four human rights organisations.
- Advocacy Unit from Ain o Salish Kendra (ASK) to provide further details.

## INDUSTRY RESPONSE

- "It is a large, ultra-modern, compliant factory," Shafiul Islam Mohiuddin, President of Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA) told a press conference on Monday.
- Mohiuddin did not comment on the report that the factory had no emergency exit from outside
- He did not give any idea if the owners were taking the responsibility for the carnage.
- A two-page statement that he read out had no mention of anything whether the factory had any infrastructural weakness. ([BD NEWS 24](#))
- BGMEA will provide 100,000 BDT to each of the victim's families as compensation.

## EVIDENCE OF NEGLIGENCE

- Inspection report conducted by Walmart over one year ago, indicate the Tazreen factory was given a "high risk" safety rating after an inspection in May 2011([Washington Post](#)).

### NEWSPAPER ARTICLES

**"The Nischintapur factory fire is the worst in Bangladesh's industrial history, one already strewn with innumerable deaths and injuries, caused by callous indifference and a reckless disregard for workers' safety"**  
**["many of us rushed out when we heard the fire alarm ring but the manager came and told us, everything's fine. Go back to work"](#)**

'Killers at Large' Published in [New Age](#), Tuesday, November 27, 2012

Ashulia fire death stays at 111, [Daily Star](#), Tuesday, November 27, 2012

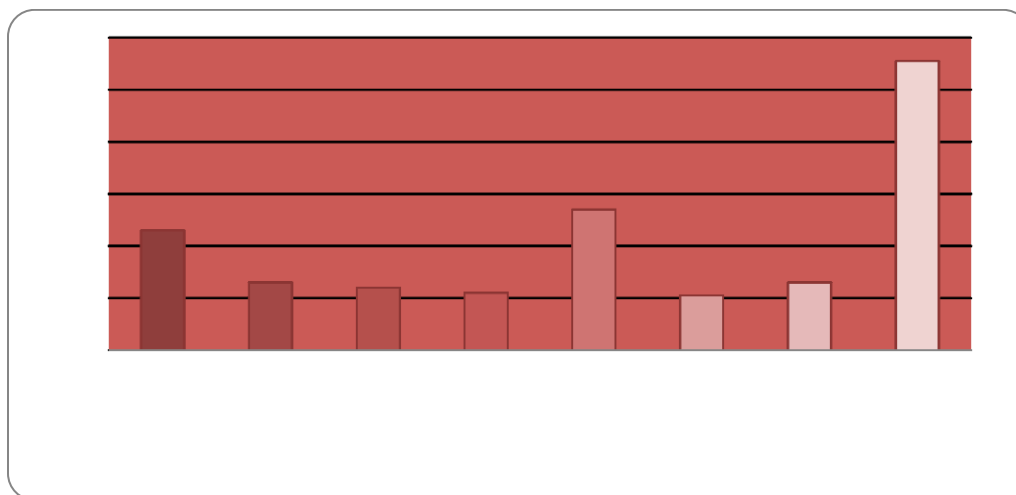
Wal-Mart says it tried to cut ties to garment factory in Bangladesh before blaze killed 112 [Washington Post](#), Tuesday November 27, 2012

Probe Panel Visits Ashulia, [BDNEWS 24](#) Monday November 26, 2012

**PHOTOS : ASK INVESTIGATION TEAM**

**Table: Statistics of Number of Death at Garments Tragedy.<sup>1</sup>**

S.L.	Place of Incidence	Number of Death	Date of Incidence
1.	Chowdhury Knitwear & Garments Factory in Narshingdi	46	25 November 2000
2.	A Garment Factory in Kafrul, Dhaka	26	1 August 2001
3.	Maico Sweeter in Mirpur, Dhaka	24	8 August 2001
4.	Shan Knitting and Processing Ltd in Narayanganj	22	6 January 2005
5.	KTS Garment Factory in Chittagong	54	23 February 2006
6.	Garib & Garib Sweeter Factory in Gazipur	21	25 February 2010
7.	Ha-Meem Group Factory in Ashulia, Dhaka	26	14 December 2010
8.	Tazreen Fashion Ltd in Ashulia, Dhaka	111	24 November 2012
Total Number of Death from 25/11/2000 to 24/11/2012		330	



**Chart: Statistics of Number of Death at Garments Tragedy with Date.<sup>2</sup>**

<sup>1</sup> The Daily Star; 27/11/2012

<sup>2</sup> The Daily Star; 27/11/2012























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**নোটিশ**

এতদ্বারা তাজবীন ফ্যাশনস লিমিটেড এ কর্মরত সকল শ্রমিক , কর্মচারী  
 কর্মকর্তাদের অবগতির জন্য জানানো যাচ্ছে যে , আগামী ০৫/০৩/২০১৩  
 তারিখ হতে ছুটিতে যাওয়ার পূর্বে অবশ্যই ফ্যাক্টরীর জেনারেল ম্যানেজার  
 এ্যাডমিন এ্যাড কম্পাউন্ড























