

## **Bangladesh: Recent factory blaze a result of impunity and disregard of workers' rights**

(Bangkok, 5 August 2021) – The fire at the Hashem Foods and Beverages factory on 8 July owned by the Sajeeb Group in Rupganj, in the Narayanganj district of Bangladesh, is yet another industrial disaster resulting from lax enforcement and negligence by government agencies and businesses.

The Bangladesh authorities should promptly investigate the incident, hold those responsible to account, and adequately compensate victims and their families, said the Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development (FORUM-ASIA) and three of its members in Bangladesh.

The fire that broke out around 4.30 pm in the factory, killing at least 52 workers, with 50 more injured in their attempts to jump from the building and many still unidentified.<sup>1</sup> The victims also include child labourers employed by the factory, a clear violation of child labour laws, both domestically and internationally.<sup>2</sup>

Workers were unable to escape the factory when the fire broke out due to blocked exits and absence of any fire safety measures. Improper and illegal storage of chemicals and flammable substances in the factory further added fuel to the fire, impeding firefighters' attempts to douse the flames. As of 2 August 2021, 45 charred bodies have been identified.

This has been the latest in the growing series of industrial accidents in Bangladesh, the most prominent being the Rana Plaza disaster in 2013 that was purported to have brought in an era of industrial safety from the lessons learnt. It is also reminiscent of similar incidents of factory fires that include the Tampaco Foil Factory fire in 2016 and Chawbazaar fire in 2019.

While some compensation has been promised to victims' family members by the Central and district administration,<sup>3</sup> it remains inadequate in both its scope and intent. The formation of a committee on July 15 by the Prime Minister's Office to prevent industrial accidents will have to prove to be willing and capable to effectively ensure proper implementation of industrial safety measures in the country.<sup>4</sup>

The investigation into the latest factory blaze must seek accountability and justice for those involved. Instead of allowing impunity for illicit business operations, the government should prioritise the protection of rights and safety of workers who drive the economic growth of the country.

FORUM-ASIA and its member organisations urge Bangladeshi authorities to:

- Ensure adequate compensation and access to effective remedies to the victims and their families, in accordance with the United Nations Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights.<sup>5</sup>
- Conduct thorough investigations into the irregularities and illegalities of the operations of the Hashem Foods and Beverages factory, holding those responsible for any form of illicit business conduct to account.
- Ensure timely submission of and implementation of recommendations from the reports from investigating agencies to probe into the incident, including the Criminal Investigation

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.dhakatribune.com/bangladesh/nation/2021/07/09/narayanganj-factory-fire-rages-on-many-feared-dead>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.dhakatribune.com/bangladesh/nation/2021/07/09/child-workers-still-missing-in-disastrous-narayanganj-factory-fire>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.dhakatribune.com/bangladesh/nation/2021/07/09/state-minister-announces-assistance-for-casualties-in-narayanganj-factory-fire>

<sup>4</sup> <https://bdnews24.com/economy/2021/07/16/bangladesh-forms-committee-to-ensure-factory-safety-inspections-after-deadly-fire>

<sup>5</sup> <https://undocs.org/A/72/162>

Department<sup>6</sup>, the Fire Service and Civil Defense, the Department of Inspection for Factories and Establishments (DIFE), and the Department of Explosives<sup>7</sup> as well as the committee formed by the Prime Minister's Office to prevent industrial accidents.

- Supplement the findings from government agencies with the report from the civil society led probe committee.<sup>8</sup>

**Signed by:**

1. Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development (FORUM-ASIA)
2. Odhikar
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**About FORUM-ASIA:**

- **The Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development (FORUM-ASIA)** is a regional network of 81 member organisations across 21 Asian countries, with consultative status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council, and consultative relationship with the ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights. Founded in 1991, FORUM-ASIA works to strengthen movements for human rights and sustainable development through research, advocacy, capacity-development and solidarity actions in Asia and beyond. Its regional secretariat is in Bangkok, and it has sub-regional offices in Geneva, Jakarta, and Kathmandu. [www.forum-asia.org](http://www.forum-asia.org)

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<sup>6</sup> <https://www.dhakatribune.com/bangladesh/2021/07/16/cid-to-investigate-narayanganj-factory-fire-case>

<sup>7</sup> <https://thediplomat.com/2021/07/narayanganj-fire-same-problems-no-solutions-to-industrial-accidents-in-bangladesh/>

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.thedailystar.net/news/bangladesh/accidents-fires/news/narayanganj-fire-concerned-citizens-form-19-member-probe-committee-2129916>