



# CLEAN CLOTHES CAMPAIGN

Improving working conditions  
in the global garment industry



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## Spectrum disaster update #3:

### Protests continue as companies still fail to help their workers

More pressure needed on brands at collapsed Spectrum factory Bangladesh

May 12, 2005

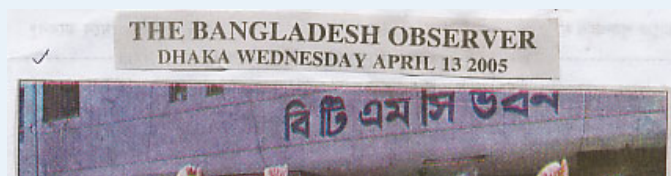
Dear Friends,

Since the last update, the death toll has reached 74 and many workers are still missing, trapped under the debris of the Spectrum Sweaters factory building which collapsed on April 11th.

The facility, located in Savar, an industrial town northwest of Dhaka, housed the Spectrum Sweater Ltd and Shahriar Fabrics Ltd and produced for several well-known European brands like Zara, Carrefour and Karstadt Quelle. The CCC, in cooperation with Bangladeshi trade unions and labour groups, has been calling for action by the buyers and authorities. For background information please see [here](#)



Last week public protests in Bangladesh continued when several unions organized May Day rallies, in Dhaka. Another protest organized by the National Garment Workers Federation NGWF involved a display of solidarity by making a human chain in which 52 Spectrum workers and the families of the victims took part. On May 6th a symbolic one hour hunger-strike was organised by garment workers in Dhaka and workers' organisations promised more demonstrations and protests if the government did not meet their demands. This year Karmojibi Nari organised a protest rally on April 30th with the participation of 2000 garment workers in Dhaka attended by a mother of two workers who died at the Spectrum factory, who spoke to protesters saying that they must ensure that the authorities take action in this tragedy and bring those responsible to justice.





The latest news in this case is that the factory owner Mr. Shahriar Saeed and Mr. Altaf Fakir, one of the directors of the Spectrum factory, appeared in court on May 8th to apply for bail. Lawyers successfully contested their bail application and the court ordered both men to be imprisoned pending the following bail hearing which will be held on May 12th. This unprecedented court decision (despite a long string of deadly 'incidents' in garment factories, mainly due to fires, as yet no factory owner has ever been found guilty) was referred to as 'one step forward' by Amirul Haque Amin of the NGWF, who had 39 members working at Spectrum in the factory and was one of the organisations hiring a lawyer to contest the application.

While workers' organisations remain active, the Clean Clothes Campaign is extremely disappointed to find out on Tuesday May 10 that the Business Social Compliance Initiative (BSCI) mission to Bangladesh, originally scheduled to take place late last week, has been delayed. This delay is disturbing as it comes on the heels of the sourcing companies' initial reluctance to involve themselves in helping the workers who were making their products. The BSCI informed us that they have contracted a small German-



owned consultancy based in Bangladesh to conduct a fact-finding investigation, including consultation with local labour groups, and will only organize its mission once this is completed, at the end of the month. The BSCI companies will therefore send their mission to Bangladesh in June at the earliest. Clean Clothes Campaign believes all buyers should urgently and directly get in touch with workers and their organizations to discuss the set of demands as outlined on April 15, and is upset that apparently BSCI member companies will only visit the country two months after the tragedy. Meanwhile, workers and their families face an extremely difficult situation. The BSCI member companies, as well as other brands, fail completely to guarantee that the workers who made their sweaters receive appropriate relief and compensation, the first of the set of three demands presented on April 15th. Surviving workers from Spectrum and Shariar are presently unemployed, and facing high medical and other costs. These workers and their families must receive financial support, new jobs and training. They are also entitled to receive their back wages and overtime wages which have not yet been paid out - workers report outstanding wages up to several months. The Clean Clothes Campaign will intensify its efforts to pressure the brands to act immediately and to stop stalling while workers are facing this appalling situation.

Workers report that the the national factory owners' association (BGMEA) is presently paying some of the families of the dead workers 100,000 taka, which is substantially lower than the amounts called for by unions and labour groups. The BGMEA has made it publicly known that they refuse to pay any compensation to the injured workers, who in some cases even had to pay for their medical treatment. An article in The Daily Star reports how some workers were paralysed or had their limbs amputated due to injuries sustained when heavy machinery fell on them when the building collapsed. Though several investigations are now underway, by public authorities as well as other groups, there is no full, independent and transparent investigation, the second demand. Again, the newspaper The Daily Star reports that the manner in which some of the investigation are being conducted suggests that it not impartial or transparent. The building authority RAJUK blames the 4 owners and 3 of the construction engineers for the collapse of the building. The Factory and Organisation Inspection Department filed a compensation suit with Dhaka's first Labour Court on April 16. The Workers' Compensation Act of 1923 was cited under which only 21,000 taka was claimed as compensation for only 44 dead workers. The great haste with which the case was filed, the choice of the Act under which the case was filed and the death toll cited seem to lend credence to the allegation that attempts are being made to ensure that the owners face

lesser charges and are treated leniently by the government for their role in this tragedy.

Most of the brands sourcing at the factory have stated that they had not commissioned any audits at the factory and one of the companies, Carrefour, had commissioned an audit but have not yet made this audit public. The owners' association BGMEA also conducted their own investigation but have not made their findings public.

Workers knew of structural problems in the factory such as equipment that was too heavy for the factory floor, boiling water that had escaped from a dyeing machine killing a worker, as well as a worker was seriously electrocuted by exposed wiring. In Worker Report number 16, a worker tells how the main gate was locked when they tried to escape from the collapsed building. Another Worker Report, number 20, tells how witnesses saw that only bricks and sand were used to construct the foundation of the building. These examples demonstrate a disturbing pattern of ignoring safety regulations, withholding information and bias regarding the causes of the factory's collapse.

Interviews with workers also indicate that there is not even a reliable figure for the number of dead, injured and missing workers. The number of dead varies from 60 to 74 and there are no records to indicate how many workers still might be missing and still buried in the debris.

Finally, no response has been forthcoming regarding immediate structural measures must be put in place to prevent future similar incidents. Local trade unions have proposed forming a tripartite committee involving the BGMEA, government and trade unions to consult regarding working conditions in Bangladeshi garment factories.

The Clean Clothes Campaign, together with our Bangladeshi partners, will continue to pressure the brands concerned and keep up its efforts to document and collect information directly from the workers. We'll keep our network informed of any developments and calls for action.



TOP



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