

Disney, Sears Used Factory in Fire

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DHAKA, Bangladesh (AP) — Amid the ash, broken glass and melted sewing machines at what is left of the Tazreen Fashions Ltd. factory, there are piles of blue, red and off-white children's shorts bearing Wal-Mart's Faded Glory brand. Shorts from hip-hop star Sean Combs' ENYCE label lay on the floor, along with a hooded Mickey Mouse sweatshirt from Disney.

An Associated Press reporter searching the Bangladesh factory Wednesday found these and other clothes, including sweaters from the French company Teddy Smith and the Scottish company Edinburgh Woollen Mill, among the equipment charred in the fire that killed 112 workers on Saturday. He also found entries in account books indicating that the factory took orders to produce clothes for Disney, Sears and other Western brands.

Garments and documents left behind in the factory show it was used by a host of major American and European retailers, though at least one of them — Wal-Mart — had been aware of safety problems. Wal-Mart blames a supplier for using Tazreen Fashions without its knowledge.

The fire has elevated awareness of something labor groups, retailers and

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Published on Chem.Info (<http://www.chem.info>)

governments have known for years: Bangladesh's fast-growing garment industry — second only to China's in exports — is rife with dangerous workplaces. More than 300 workers there have died in fires since 2006.

Police on Wednesday arrested three factory officials suspected of locking in the workers who died in Saturday's fire, the deadliest in the South Asian country's less than 35-year history of exporting clothing.

Local police chief Habibur Rahman said the three will be questioned amid reports that many workers trying to escape the blaze had been locked inside. He said the owner of the factory was not among those arrested.

The three officials were arrested Wednesday at their homes in Savar, the Dhaka suburb where the factory is located. Rahman did not identify the officials or give their job status.



About 1,400 workers worked at the plant, some 70 percent of them women. Most are from the north, the poorest region of Bangladesh.

Workers who survived the fire say exit doors were locked, and a fire official has said that far fewer people would have died if there had been even one emergency exit. Of the dead, 53 bodies were burned so badly they could not be identified; they were buried anonymously.

The fire started on the ground floor, where a factory worker named Nasima said stacks of yarn and clothes blocked part of the stairway.

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Nasima, who uses only one name, and other workers said that when they tried to flee, managers told them to go back to their work stations, but they were ignored.

Dense smoke filled the stairway, making it hard to see, and when the lights went out the workers were left in total darkness. Another worker, Mohammad Rajib, said some people used their cellphones to light their way.

"Everyone was screaming for help," Nasima said. "Total chaos, panic and screaming. Everyone was trying to escape and come out. I was pulling the shirt of a man. I fainted and when I woke up I found myself lying on the road outside the factory.

"I don't know how I survived."



Rajib said the factory conducted a fire drill just three days before the fire broke out, but no one used the fire extinguishers. "Only a selected group of workers are trained to use the extinguishers. Others have no idea how to use them," he said.

The AP reporter who examined the factory Wednesday saw dozens of fire extinguishers with tags indicating they were inspected early this month. Many appeared unused.

Workers expressed support for the factory owner, Delwar Hossain. Rajib said he is "a gentle man" who heeded workers when they protested for more pay and against rough behavior by some managers.

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"He took action and fired some of them," he said. "He did not sack any worker. He told us: 'You are my people. If you survive, I will survive.'"

Most the fire's devastation took place on the second and third floors. Sewing and embroidery machines and tables burned to ashes, ceiling fans melted and floor and wall tiles were broken, apparently because of excessive heat. Thick black ash covers everything in the upper floors of the eight-story building.

Much of the clothing on the lower floors was incinerated. Nightgowns, children's shorts, pants, jackets and sweat shirts were strewn about, piled up in some places, boxed in others. Cartons of kids' hooded sweaters, off-white with red and black print, were marked "Disney Pixar."

Among the Disney garments was a gray sweatshirt emblazoned with the image of Lightning McQueen, the star of Pixar's "Cars" movies.



A pair of blue ENYCE shorts was still on a sewing machine.

There were also at least four register books listing buyers including Wal-Mart, Disney, Sears and other companies. Also listed was Li & Fung, a Hong Kong-based buying house that is among the biggest suppliers of garment products from Bangladesh. Li & Fung issued a statement Monday saying it placed orders at the factory for just one company, Kids Headquarters, and that the value of those orders totaled just \$111,000.

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Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and Interior Minister Muhiuddin Khan Alamgir have said arson is suspected. Police say they have not ruled out sabotage.

Wal-Mart had received an audit deeming the factory "high risk" last year, said it had decided to stop doing business with Tazreen, but that a supplier subcontracted work to the factory anyway. Wal-Mart said it stopped working with that supplier on Monday.

Calls made to The Walt Disney Company and to Sears Holdings were not immediately returned.

Local TV reports said about 3,000 garment workers held protests over the fire Wednesday, blocking roads and throwing stones at some factories and vehicles. It was the third straight day of demonstrations.

Police used batons to disperse the protesters, but no injuries were immediately reported.



According to local television, most factories in the area closed after opening briefly because of the protests — a common tactic to avoid violence.

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Associated Press writer Farid Hossain contributed to this report.

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Source URL (retrieved on 02/01/2015 - 9:11am):

http://www.chem.info/news/2012/11/disney-sears-used-factory-fire?cmpid=related_content