

# Bangladesh Industrial Disasters: Playing with people's lives

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When the government administration fails continuously to act to establish the rule of law, the rule of crooked individuals starts consolidating. Politicians belonging to the party in power and a section of government officials establish their own rule and play with people's lives to amass money and assets. And for their unbridled greed, people are to pay heavily; in many cases they are denied their right to life.

The Savar tragedy has been one of the glaring examples of it in recent history, demonstrating the very poor state of the rule of law in the country.

A ruling party man had built the nine-storied building without following building construction laws. Reportedly, he even grabbed the land on which he had built the Rana Plaza, which is now a mountain of debris, having killed more than 200 garment workers.

As he is a ruling party man, he did not need to face any hurdle in retaining the possession of the grabbed land and he did not need to follow the laws properly to build the Rana Plaza. Even the law enforcers, the Industrial Police after being informed about the cracks in the building, could not enforce the law as the building owner is a ruling party man who is blessed by the ruling party's local MP.

The industrial police formed in 2010 to ensure safety and security of industries and workers, visited the building on Tuesday morning on information that some cracks had developed on some pillars and a few floors of the building following a jolt.

The industrial police asked the building authorities not to open the building but suspend operations of the factories after the cracks were noticed Tuesday, but they ignored the police.

This demonstrates the common weakness of the police in always feeling shaky about enforcing the laws when they need to do so against the ruling party men.

Again, the way the owners of the garment factories located in Rana Plaza ignored the BGMEA's reported instruction to suspend their work on Wednesday shows a lack of discipline within the organisation.

However, the Savar tragedy is not an isolated incident. Lack of enforcement of laws has caused many such man-made disasters in recent years, killing hundreds of people.

The nine- storey Spectrum Garments at Savar collapsed in April 2005, killing 64. The son-in-law of a then ruling BNP MP was its owner. Again, the five-storey Phoenix Group at Tejagon collapsed in February 2006, killing 21 and a five-storey residential building at Begunbari collapsed in June, 2010 killing 25. After the collapse, it was known that all the buildings had been built in violation of the building code.

Non-compliance garments factories have become a virtual death valley. A fire at Tazreen Fashion in November last year killed more than 115 garment workers. There were more incidents in incidents of fire in garment industries.

The violation of laws in nexus by crooked government officials and ruling party men in regard to plying water transport have become another area of frequent man made disasters that leaves numerous people. One of the worse launch capsizes took place in March last year on the Meghna river, killing no fewer than 145 passengers.

The road network is not free of the curse of corruption and violation of laws. Due to illegal practices and blessings by ruling party men, untrained drivers get driving licenses, and unfit vehicles get road permits. This causes frequent road accidents, killing a huge number and maiming many every year.

The frequent man made disasters might have made people forget the Nimtoli devastating fire incident in June 2010, which instantly killed instantly 117 people. A chemical warehouse situated on the ground floor of a five-storied residential building was the main source of the fire. Hundreds of chemical warehouses were set up in the residential areas in the old part of the capital by obtaining licenses through bribing government officials responsible to issue license for the warehouse.

In fact, there is no dearth of laws. But the failure of the government administration under the leadership of politicians is causing havoc in people's lives and properties in addition to the violent political programmes on the streets. And in almost all cases, people responsible for the disasters remain unpunished, thanks to the lack of rule of law.

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\* The Daily Star. FRIDAY, APRIL 26, 2013. NEWS ANALYSIS  
<http://www.thedailystar.net/beta2/news/playing-with-peoples-lives/>