

Industrial accidents in Bangladesh are another sign of inequality

September 22 2016, by Palash Kamruzzaman



Credit: AI-generated image ([disclaimer](#))

Bangladesh, [once dismissed as a "basket case"](#) for development, has made remarkable progress in many aspects of [human](#) and [economic development](#) in the last couple of decades.

The people of Bangladesh are a key element in this remarkable

advancement. They work hard on scarce farming land, risk their lives in ready-made garment factories and other labour-intensive industries, and take on low-skilled jobs abroad to send money home.

But as well as being one of the key drivers for making Bangladesh an emerging success story, the general population is the group that often pay the heaviest price for development.

Death and destruction hit workers at factories in [Rana Plaza in 2013](#) (official death toll: 1,126) and [Tazreen Fashion in 2012](#) (official death toll: 117). The latest addition to this grim list is [the explosion at a packaging factory Tampaco Foils](#) in September 2016, where the reported number of dead people was 34, with many others critically injured.

It seems that people die in large numbers in Bangladesh, especially in industrial accidents. Accidents do happen but when such a trend persists it is worth questioning the social structure behind it.

Any of these incidents, in an advanced democracy, [would have resulted in a major governmental shake up](#). Sadly, in Bangladesh, this is not the case. Apart from a bit of rhetoric about investigations, a few messages of sympathy from political leaders, and [some compensation packages for victims' families](#), no meaningful changes follow.

This clearly highlights a significant lack of democratic accountability – and a poor state of national law and order.

Investigations into these accidents take years. Perpetrators are often never brought to justice and issues are swept under the carpet thanks to political patronage and high level connections [between the worlds of business and politics](#).

Understandably, delays in justice also prompt fears of denial of justice. It remains to be seen how long it will take to investigate what happened at Tampaco Foils and whether anyone will be held accountable. The owners of Tazreen fashion were only formally indicted and ordered to stand trial for negligence [after nearly three years](#) (the case is still continuing).

The Bangladesh paradox

Power, money, and political connections can offer a form of indemnity for some. High profile cases in other crimes such as murder in which perpetrators remain at large or are yet to be brought to justice also loom in the public consciousness for their connection to power or wealth. As a consequence, a sense of lawlessness is growing in Bangladesh.

Ordinary people seem to accept that fairness in trials and justice for them are highly unlikely. In fact, the state of disillusionment in the justice system is so high, that some people don't even want the pretence of justice to play a role in their tragedies. One university professor, the father of a murdered publisher, [recently declared](#): "I don't want justice". This is a shocking development for any society in the 21st century.

The Bangladesh paradox, in which its visible successes exist so visibly next to its social failures, [deserves to be analysed](#). While the country is definitely making great progresses in some areas, it is also true that there is a democratic deficit, [politics is dysfunctional](#), corruption is rife, and public accountability is low. Nepotism and political allegiance matter more than anyone's capability and merit.

Tragic accidents in labour-intensive industries do not lead to positive changes because power, money and political connections suppress opinions and oppress the victims. The poor continue to die in their hundreds and thousands, and suffer ill treatment and a lack of job

security. This subjects them to further poverty and a precarious future.

The apparent inevitability of major accidents is embedded in an emerging [social structure](#) that protects the elites, and pays little attention to the safety and lives of the poor. Social justice does not exist.

And when social justice does not exist, it is sometimes replaced with a cold and hostile environment which can breed even more lawlessness and violence. In light of [recent terrorist activities](#) in the country (in which the [government has denied any international involvement](#)), one also wonders whether home grown radical terror groups are just the latest destructive force borne out of the current socio-political state of the country.

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