

Beat: Miscellaneous

Bangladesh building collapse death toll rises to 661

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USPA News - The death toll from one of the world's worst industrial disasters in modern history surpassed 660 Monday after rescue workers in Bangladesh recovered dozens of decomposing bodies from the site where an eight-story factory building collapsed nearly two weeks ago, officials said. The deadly accident occurred at around 9 a.m. local time on April 24 when an eight-story factory building in Savar, located on the outskirts of the capital Dhaka, collapsed.

It is believed between 3,100 and 4,500 people were working in the building, from which five clothing factories were operating. A spokesman for the army's control room, which was set up to coordinate the rescue and recovery operation, said the death toll stood at 661 by late Monday afternoon. A total of 43 bodies had been recovered between midnight and 4 p.m. local time, following the recovery of 54 bodies on Sunday. "We expect to find more bodies in the coming days," the spokesman said. Nearly two weeks after the disaster, it remains unclear how many bodies could still be trapped under the rubble and there is no official list of missing people. A total of 2,437 people were rescued from the site during the initial rescue operation, which could mean hundreds may still be missing. Scores of people were still waiting Monday to find their loved ones, but newly discovered bodies are now almost beyond recognition as they have begun to decompose. Identification papers and other possessions are now being used in attempts to identify the bodies and return them to their families for burial. The massive rescue operation to find more survivors had come to a brutal end on April 28. A woman who had survived under the rubble for more than 110 hours was in the process of being rescued when sparks from saws caused clothes to catch fire, killing the last known survivor. Last month's collapse happened just a day after factory workers discovered a large crack in the building and left their work, but the owner claimed it was safe and warned workers that they would not be paid if they did not return to work. Local authorities had ordered the owner to shut down until details about the building's condition were known, but police orders to evacuate were not followed. Nine people have so far been arrested in the wake of the deadly collapse, and police said Monday that the owner could face possible murder charges. Last week, Pope Francis condemned as "slave labor" the poor conditions for thousands of people who worked at the factory building. "Not paying a just [wage], not providing work, focusing exclusively on the balance books, on financial statements, only looking at making personal profit. That goes against God," he said, as quoted by Vatican Radio. The pontiff said he had been particularly struck by a headline that said the workers at the Savar factory were being paid only 38 euros (\$50) a month. "This was the payment of these people who have died. And this is called slave labor!" he said. "How many brothers and sisters throughout the world are in this situation because of these economic, social, and political attitudes?" Accidents such as the one last month are not uncommon in Bangladesh due to poorly regulated safety standards, but never had it been so deadly as in Savar. At least 83 people were killed in 2005 when another garment factory collapsed on the outskirts of Dhaka, even though there had been obvious signs that the building was not safe.

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