

# Bangladesh garment factories to close

DHAKA, BANGLADESH: Hundreds of Bangladeshi garment factories are to close indefinitely after worker unrest sparked by last month's collapse of a nine-storey building, the textile industry's main body said on Monday (13 May).



"All factories at Ashulia industrial area will be shut down indefinitely from Tuesday (14 May) due to unrest by the workforce," Shahidullah Azim, vice president of the Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association, told AFP.

"We've made the decision to ensure the security of our factories," he said.

In a separate development, Swedish group H&M said it had agreed to sign an agreement drafted by global unions to improve safety in the Bangladeshi textile factories it uses.

The world's largest fashion retailer by revenue has agreed to a five-year fire and building safety plan first launched in 2012 by global union federations IndustriALL and UNI Global Union.

The agreement includes appointing an independent chief inspector who will "design and implement a fire safety inspection programme that is credible and effective," it said.

The agreement requires one or more qualified experts to "complete a full and rigorous review of current building standards and regulations" for garment manufacturers.

Activists had set today (15 May) as a deadline for signing the accord.

The full list of signatories has yet to be released, but US-based HPV, owner of the Tommy Hilfiger and Calvin Klein brands, and Germany's Tchibo, were among the first to sign it, according to anti-sweatshop network The Clean Clothes Campaign.

The announcement came less than three weeks after a nine-storey garment factory complex in a suburb of Dhaka caved in and buried thousands of workers. The death toll from the country's worst industrial disaster has climbed to 1,126.

There are around 4,500 garment factories in Bangladesh, churning out products for Western fashion labels, which sell the clothing at many times the cost price.

The country is the world's second-largest apparel maker and the US\$20bn industry accounted for up to 80% of annual exports last year.

Source: AFP via I-Net Bridge

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