

= 2006 Kolkata leather factory fire =

The 2006 Kolkata leather factory fire was a deadly industrial fire that occurred in West Bengal , India , on 22 November 2006 . The fire broke out in a leather bag factory located in the Tannix International , Topsia , in the South 24 Parganas district in Greater Kolkata area , and generated a wave of criticism of the poor safety standards in place among the country 's sweatshops .

The industrial fire claimed the lives of at least ten people , who were unable to escape because the doors were locked shut illegally . Authorities , in response to local residents ' angry criticism , admitted that the emergency response to the accident was substandard . Two separate investigations were launched . One inquiry focused on the fire itself , while the other sought to ascertain criminal responsibility for the disaster as well as the operation of the illegal factory . The results of both are either pending or have yet to be released to the general public .

= = Background = =

Investigators confirmed that the site of the fire had been used as an illegal factory to manufacture leather bags . The factory was located on the third floor of a four @-@ story building , which also featured residential units . Investigators determined that the first and second floors of the structure housed additional illegal factories . The factory destroyed in the fire was found to be owned and operated by Tenex Exports , and all of the people who were killed or injured in the fire slept in the factory at night , a situation that is not considered unusual in India . There was had just one emergency exit , and 40 workers were housed in the structure at the time of the fire , and the owner had locked the factory at night to prevent workers from running away with leather goods . The building was located in the Tannix International , Topsia , in the South 24 Parganas district of Greater Kolkata region .

= = Event and emergency response = =

The fire broke out in the factory at around 2 : 30 IST , as workers slept . Once they became aware of the blaze , the employees found they were unable to break through the factory 's locked doors . Five fire tenders were sent to the scene , but by the time they arrived , local residents had broken down two locked gates and already rescued the surviving workers . These impromptu Rescue efforts were delayed however , when an individual carrying keys to open the door nervously dropped them while attempting to open the gate . At least 10 people were dead by the time rescuers reached the factory 's interior , with a further eighteen injured . The survivors , many suffering from burns over 70 percent of their bodies , were taken to the National Medical College and Hospital , where victims had to be left on the floor due to a shortage of beds . The hospital did not have a burns unit , and the only treatments available at the hospital were ointments and saline drips . The patients were eventually moved to other hospitals . Local MLA Javed Khan later said that the death toll is actually at least twelve , but there has been no official confirmation of this . The Rapid Action Force was also deployed to maintain calm .

= = Criticisms of the emergency response = =

People living in the vicinity of the illegal factory said that the number of deaths might have been reduced had the fire service responded promptly . They claimed that the fire brigade failed to send personnel or equipment to the scene until more than an hour after the brigade first received word of the fire . Residents also claimed that it was only after the police arrived and requested fire service backup that any help was sent . In addition , some on the scene reported an inadequate number of ambulances . The city 's mayor admitted to this lapse the following morning . Local people also complained that the victims should never have been taken to the Calcutta National Medical College , but that they should have been transported directly to hospitals with burns units .

= = Investigations = =

= = = Accident investigation = = =

An investigation has been launched to determine the cause of the fire as well as the reason the building had been locked from the outside . To this end , the building was inspected by the KMC , and was subsequently scheduled to be demolished on Thursday , November 23 . However , the structure is standing as of 2007 . Although no actual cause of the fire has been established , it has been noted that large quantities of inflammable materials , such as adhesives , were stored inside the building . It was also revealed that the factory experienced a similar fire two years previously , but on that occasion there were no fatalities .

= = = Criminal investigation = = =

A separate criminal investigation focused on the illegal factory itself . Almost all factories and homes in the area were illegal and unauthorised , and do not follow building codes and sanctions . Mayor Bikash Ranjan Bhattacharya said action would be taken against the owners of the factory and house , and Superintendent of Police of South 24 Parganas S. N. Gupta said that the owners of the building would be arrested . Investigation has shown that the Kolkata Municipal Corporation ( KMC ) issued notices to the building on three separate occasions , in 1988 , 1989 , and 1992 , yet took no further action . It has been shown , however , that the KMC also approved trade licences for two businesses to operate from the building . The owner of the building , Khurshid Alam , has had a police complaint filed against him by the fire department for illegal construction charges . Mohammed Sagir Ahmed and Mohammed Asif , the owners of Tenex Exports , also face related charges . Both investigations are ongoing .

= = Aftermath = =

The day after this tragedy , workers in the unorganized leather industry of Topsia area held protest rallies demanding compensation for the relatives of the deceased workers , better working conditions and a probe into the fire mishap . The mayor of Kolkata convened an all @-@ party meeting to discuss the incident and also promised to initiate a drive demolish illegal constructions in the area . The labour inspectors inspected the building and declared the factory as illegal . Even though the building was declared illegal and unsafe , a month later , the police raided the house and found that another leather factory was operating behind closed doors in the ground floor of the building . The civic officials issued a notice to stop any work in the building . Though local residents alleged that clandestine work started in the building with the help of local MLA , Javen Khan , Khan himself blamed it rather on the police .

In 2008 , two more fire mishaps occurred in the leather industries in the area , one in the month of March and the other in June : a total of nine people got injured in these two incidents . Even though fire safety licenses and insurances for the workers of the leather factories were made mandatory after the fire incident of 2006 , none of the authorities ? the municipal corporation , the services department of the state government , and the police ? ensured that these were actually followed by the factories . The local residents claimed that the owner of the factory that was impacted in the fire incident of 2006 , now operates from another address of the same area . According to fire brigade officials , the Topsia area along with nearby Tiljala and Tangra forms the most fire @-@ prone area of the city , and that around three to four fires break out every week , though they do not get reported in the media as there is no loss of life .