

## 06 BAN 5 – 06-05-20 Gazipur

Laboratoire des frondeurs.org



Distance Gazipur - Dhaka = 27 km à vol d'oiseau

Villes les plus importantes de la province de Dhaka [cercles verts]

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Front Page

## **1 killed in cop firing on garment workers**

*200 also hurt while agitating on Gazipur highway for pay hike, withdrawal of false case*

Staff Correspondent

One garment worker was killed and some 200 others were injured yesterday as police baton-charged and then opened fire on a mass of rampaging workers of a garment factory in Gazipur.

Five policemen were also injured when the workers demonstrating in demand of a wage hike and withdrawal of an alleged false case by the factory owners locked horns with police in a pitched battle.

As on 9:20 last night, the name of the dead worker in his early twenties could not be ascertained.

Witnesses said a few hundred workers of FM Sweater Factory of SQ Group at Mauna Channapara in Sreepur went on strike from yesterday to drive their 10-point set of demands home.

Their major demands of the factory management were a pay hike, release of two co-workers now detained by police and withdrawal of what they alleged a false case against some 80 others.

As the management rejected their demands, the striking workers launched a demonstration inside the factory compound at about 8 in the morning, witnesses said.

The management called in police, who locked the factory's main gate.

Furious, the demonstrators came out of the factory compound scaling the boundary wall. They gathered on the nearby Dhaka-Mymensingh Highway and tried to block it, leading to a skirmishing between the workers and police. The two sides chased and counter-chased each other for a while.

During the clash, police fired several rubber bullets and tear gas shells.

Some 200 workers including Mahtab, 22, Asad, 25, Abul Hossain, 23, Habibur Rahman, 26, Manjurul, 23, Maruf, 25, Razzak, 19, Nazimpudhin, 20, Suruj, 20, Amzad, 22, and Harun, 23, were injured. They were later admitted to local hospitals and clinics.

On the other side, Nayek Bashudev and constables Harun Ur Rashid, Rajib Kumar, Abul Hossain and Abul Kashem were wounded as the agitated workers pelted brickbats on them. They were undergoing treatment at Gazipur Sadar Hospital last night.

With tension mounting rapidly, the garment workers at about 1pm went on a rampage, damaging vehicles and ransacking the factory building, besides continuing with pelting brickbats at police, witnesses said.

It was when police opened fire, hitting one of the workers standing near the factory entrance. Witnesses said police dragged away the body, put it in a sack, and hid it in a second-floor warehouse of the factory.

At 5pm Gazipur police super Atiqul Islam handed over the bullet-hit body to the workers. Witnesses said a bullet went through his right chest.

A number of workers alleged police opened fire on them at about 2pm from inside the factory without any provocation, when the situation was getting calm.

The police super said during the incident Additional Police Super M Mafizuddin and Sreepur Police Station Officer-in-Charge were present at the spot. "I don't know who ordered to open fire," he told the press.

After the incident, Director Mohiuddin and officials of the factory disappeared from the area locking the factory gate.

The workers became involved in a dispute with the factory management on May 11, when they raised a 10-point set of demands including proper salary and end to repression on them.

On that day, some knitting section workers allegedly assaulted some officials. Mohiuddin filed a case with Sreepur Police Station naming three workers as the main accused of the assault and 80 others as accomplices.

Later police arrested knitting operators Aminul and Mujibur Rahman.

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<http://www.newagebd.com/2006/may/21/front.html#2>

## **Garment workers fight pitched battles with police**

*One killed, 70 injured at Sripur*

Our Correspondent . Gazipur

At least one person was killed and 70 others, including police men and journalists, were injured as hundreds of garment workers fought pitched battles with the law enforcers at Sripur under Gazipur district on Saturday.

The angry workers, backed by locals, put up barricades on Dhaka-Mymensingh highway blocking traffic for about six hours, damaged vehicles and set fire to several factories during the day-long clashes.

Witnesses said about 1,000 garment workers gathered at FS Sweater Factory of SQ Group at about 8:00am to press their demand for release of three arrested workers of the factory.

As they started work abstention, authorities of the factory confined them inside and snapped power and water supply. They did not allow any one to enter or get out of the factory. The long confinement in sweltering heat triggered off the violence inside the factory at about 11:00am. The agitated workers came out jumping over the walls and gathered on the Dhaka-Mymensingh highway.

At around noon, they brought out a procession and put up barricades on the busy highway disrupting traffic.

The situation deteriorated when the additional superintendent of police of Mymensingh, Mofiz Uddin, and the officer-in-charge of Sripur police station, Mahbub Alam, arrived at the place and the police swung into action clubbing the workers in a bid to remove the barricades.

'The workers, enraged by the police action, started hurling stones at the lawmen,' said a local, adding that the police fired 25 rounds of tear gas canisters to disperse the workers.

Witnesses said that the workers chased the police men, set fire to two motorbikes and damaged some vehicles there.

At one stage, locals joined the workers and the entire area turned into a virtual battle field. As the demonstrators turned violent, the police opened fire on them leaving at least 11 wounded.

Police then stormed the nearby villages and started beating up the workers indiscriminately and ransacked their houses.

The police reinforcements from Dhaka and Mymensingh arrived at the spot to bring the situation under control.

The workers claimed that one of them was hit by bullets and died in front of the FS Sweater Factory. They alleged that the body was dragged into the factory and hid under a heap of cartons.

The news of the killing added fuel to the agitation and the workers and locals continued demonstrations in different areas of Sripur. The barricade was withdrawn after the deputy commissioner of Gazipur, M Fazle Rabbi, visited the spot at about 3:20pm and assured the workers that the body would be handed over to them.

When the body was being taken to Gazipur sadar hospital for autopsy, the workers became agitated once again.

The injured people, including 17 police men and two journalists, were admitted to hospitals and clinics in Dhaka, Gazipur and Mymensingh.

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[http://www.gulf-times.com/site/topics/article.asp?cu\\_no=2&item\\_no=87519&version=1&template\\_id=44&parent\\_id=24](http://www.gulf-times.com/site/topics/article.asp?cu_no=2&item_no=87519&version=1&template_id=44&parent_id=24)

## **One killed as police fire on garment workers**

Published: Sunday, 21 May, 2006, 10:57 AM Doha Time

By Mizan Rahman

**DHAKA:** At least one person was killed and 20 others injured in Gazipur town north of Dhaka city as police caned and fired on a mob of unruly workers from a garment factory who were agitating yesterday for a pay hike, witnesses said. There was confusion around the FS Sweater Factory at Mauna in Sreepur area after the workers' rioted. Traffic on the busy Dhaka-Mymensingh highway area came to a halt at 2.30pm and remains disrupted.

Witnesses and police said workers of FS Sweater factory, a concern of the SQ Group, have been agitating for several days.

Police arrested eight of the demonstrators on Thursday. In protest, the workers of the factory went on strike yesterday morning to press for release of their colleagues.

"Abstaining from work, the workers were staging an agitation inside the factory. Police entered the factory at about 11am and charged to disperse the agitators, which triggered a riot," a witness said. The witnesses said police also opened fire with a shotgun at about 11.30am. The warning shots only stirred the workers.

"Flushed out of the factory, the agitators went on a violent rampage and the policemen fired again," said the witness. At least one worker was killed.

A police official in Gazipur told newsmen that police charged and fired as the unruly workers came out onto the streets and started a riot at about 1.15pm. More than 20 workers and policemen were injured, the official said.

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<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/05/22/AR2006052200463.html>

## **Workers Burn 2 Factories in Bangladesh**

The Associated Press

Monday, May 22, 2006; 1:16 PM

SAVAR, Bangladesh -- Textile workers demanding better pay and one day off per week conditions went on a rampage Monday at an industrial zone near the Bangladeshi capital, setting fire to two factories and several buses, police and witnesses said.

At least 100 people, including several police, were hurt when factory guards and riot police intervened to disperse the stick-wielding protesters at Savar, an industrial town near Dhaka, Nazmul Huda, a local reporter told The Associated Press by telephone.

The protesting workers also damaged several buses and cars after barricading a major highway to the capital, and ransacked dozens of smaller factories, police officer Jamiruddin Sheikh said.

The workers started demonstrating after authorities failed to meet their demands, which include higher wages and benefits, a six-day work week and a stop to forced overtime, Belayet Hossain, a labor leader, said.

Workers are often forced to work seven days a week or late into the night to meet production deadlines, Hossain added.

The rioting apparently began when authorities at some factories tried to stop their workers from joining the unscheduled protest.

Some workers also alleged that the protesters attacked their factories and beat them up for refusing to join in the demonstration, worker Lailee Begum said.

Textile factory owners, meanwhile, demonstrated in downtown Dhaka to protest Monday's incident and demand better security for their factories.

The owners urged authorities to investigate the attack on the factories.

Several factories that mostly make garments for export were declared shut down following the rioting, and extra police were deployed at the park.

Bangladesh has about 2,500 garment factories employing about 1.8 million workers, mostly women.

The impoverished country earns about \$6 billion each year from exports in textiles, mainly to the United States and Europe, according to Bangladesh's Export Promotion Bureau.

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<http://www.newkerala.com/news2.php?action=fullnews&id=63469>

Posted on 22 May 2006 # **PTI**

## **Fifty hurt as textile workers protest turns violent**

Dhaka: Over 50 people were injured when textile workers, demanding better pay, torched two factories and several vehicles and clashed with riot police in an industrial town near Dhaka, officials and witnesses said.

Workers of the textile units in the Savar Export Processing Zone had taken out a rally demanding better wages and incentives including a mandatory Friday off and overtime allowances.

The protests turned violent when some of the workers were stopped from joining the rally and in the rampage that followed over 100 factories were damaged and two factories and a dozen vehicle were set ablaze, witnesses said.

Later, the agitated workers blocked the Tongi-Ashulia road, stranding hundreds of vehicles.

Heavy contingents of police and Rapid Action Battalion forces were also deployed in the area.

According to the Bangladesh Export Processing Zone Authority, the protests had turned violent after outsiders entered the specialised area.

Meanwhile, the Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers' and Exporters' Association (BGMEA) smelt a 'conspiracy' in the spate of such incidents that have been occurring of late and called for a government probe.

According to the BGMEA, the factories that were damaged were employee-friendly and were prompt in the payment of wages to their workers.

The BGMEA leaders also met Commerce Minister Hafiz Uddin over the incident.

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<http://www.thedailystar.net/2006/05/23/d6052301011.htm>

Front Page

*EPZ Workers go Berserk*

## **2 RMG units set ablaze, 100 damaged, 1 killed**

Staff Correspondent

### **RMG units set ablaze, 100 damaged, 1 killed**



Angry garment workers(inset), throng the highway in front of Dhaka EPZ demanding payment of arrear wages and higher wages. They torched buses parked on a field while a garment factory is in flames in the background. PHOTO: STAR

A garment worker of Savar export processing zone (EPZ) was killed yesterday as several thousand of his colleagues clashed with employees loyal to the owners of factories while rampaging through the area demanding that their 11-point charter of demands including a pay raise be met.

Workers of different garment factories in the EPZ yesterday came out on the street, set two factories on fire, damaged more than a hundred factories and a number of vehicles, and put up barricades to drive home their demands. They also demanded payment of all unpaid salaries, overtime wages, basic wages for all, and an end to harassment by employees loyal to the owners of factories.

They torched 10 to 12 vehicles on Parishad road in Ashulia inside the EPZ.

More than a hundred persons including workers, police and journalists were injured as employees loyal to the owners attacked the workers.

Rana, 25, a garment worker from the EPZ, was admitted to the National Institute of Traumatology and Orthopaedic Rehabilitation with a bullet wound in the back. He died there in late afternoon. Tejgaon police sent the body to Dhaka Medical College morgue for autopsy. Three other garment workers were admitted to hospitals with bullet wounds.

Another worker Saiful, 30, received treatment at Dhaka Medical College Hospital for an injury in the head.

This was the second incident of garment workers' protest in a week in the capital. Following the incident EPZ authorities announced a two-day shutdown of the factories.

Demonstrating workers became violent as a rumour spread that at least one worker in the EPZ was killed as law enforcers opened fire.

A witness said the incident started as workers of Universe Knitting Factory in the EPZ called a strike yesterday morning for fair 'piece rate' (rate of wages per piece of ready made garment).

Workers of the production unit, who do not get basic wages, demanded basic and overtime wages.

"Employees loyal to the owner keep three percent from our salaries for an unknown reason. They have been doing it for years making the workers angry," said Ashiq, a worker from Universe.

Following an altercation with the management regarding yesterday's strike and their demands, the workers of Universe got locked in a battle with employees loyal to the owner. Some workers vandalized some cars inside the EPZ. The Ansars opened a few rounds of fire to control the mob, which made the workers more violent and they started damaging factories, sources said.

The demonstrating workers went to other factories and asked the workers there to join them. Hundreds of workers stepped out on the street and started damaging vehicles and throwing brickbats at windowpanes of garment factories and the EPZ branch of Shahjalal Bank.

Within an hour several thousand workers with iron rods, bamboos, and wooden planks in hands blocked the Savar-Ashulia road and started attacking all garment factories around.

"They do not pay us wages regularly. So we are on the street and damaging factories," said a garment worker.

They put up barricades on the Ashulia-Tongi road, forcing several hundred vehicles on the busy route to halt in long queues till 5:00pm. Hundreds of workers were seen walking all the way from Savar EPZ to Tongi Bridge as no vehicle was plying the road.

Fire brigade sources said the workers set fire to the factory of Bando Design Ltd in Jamgara area near Fantasy Kingdom and to A-1 Garments Factory inside the EPZ.

"Suddenly they came and started throwing brickbats at my factory. Cloths worth at least Tk 15 crore were damaged as they set my factory on fire. They also burned five buses of my factory," said Siddiquir Rahman, chairman of Bando.

BDNEWS reported that Bangladesh Export Processing Zone Authority (BEPZA) said agitators from outside incited the workers, forced into the EPZ and ransacked garment factories there. It said there are several Chinese, Korean and Malaysian factories in Savar EPZ.

### **PHOTOJOURNALIST ASSAULTED**

Saiful Islam Kallol, a photojournalist of the daily Prothom Alo was assaulted by some employees loyal to the management of a garment factory inside the EPZ while discharging his duties there. He was assaulted as he went inside a factory to take photograph of a scene where some employees were beating some workers. The employees of the factory beat Saiful up and vandalised his motorbike.

### **RAB TOOK CONTROL**

As the workers became furious, the law enforcers allegedly took a passive posture at one stage. Later large contingents of armed police and RAB went to the scene at 2:00pm. A bullhorn in hand, a RAB officer reached the EPZ gate and told the workers that persons responsible for opening fire on them will be punished.

Getting the assurance the workers slowly calmed down. However, they continued damaging factories at different places outside the EPZ.

While throwing brickbats at a glass façade of Irish Knitwear Ltd, one of the workers said the owner of Irish Knitwear has not been paying workers' wages for the last two months.

As this report was being filed yesterday evening hundreds of police and RAB personnel took control of the area while hundreds of workers were still demonstrating at the EPZ gate.

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<http://www.newagebd.com/2006/may/23/front.html#1>

### **Workers run amok at, around Savar EPZ**

*One killed, two factories set ablaze and over*

*100 damaged; 300-plus vehicles vandalised*

Arif Newaz Farazi

Authorities suspended work at the factories in the Dhaka export processing zone for a day after workers clashed with agents of garment factory owners and the police on Monday over non-payment of wages.

The workers set two garment factories on fire and more than 100 others in and outside the exclusive zone at Zamagarah in the suburban Savar, 18 kilometres off the capital city.

More than 300 vehicles were also damaged during the clash, which originated from Universal Garments Limited, after the owner of the factory failed to meet the deadline for payment of workers' salary. The workers are said to be unpaid for three months.

Two major roads – Ashulia and Ziarabo – remained closed as the trouble, which started at around 10:30am, spilled into the old and new export processing zones.

A garment worker was claimed to have been shot dead by members of the Bangladesh Ansars,





and more than 200 people were injured.

The Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association expressed concern at repeated attacks on garment factories and urged the government to enhance security at every factory.

A vested interested group has been trying to destroy the sector, which contributes 76 per cent of the foreign exchange to the national economy, the association claimed.

Contacted over telephone, Nazma Binte Alamgir, public relations officer of the Bangladesh Export Processing Zone Authority, told New Age that the operation of the EPZ would remain suspended on Tuesday.

The garment workers, meanwhile, announced work stoppage at garment factories in Savar in protest against the attack on them.

The workers put up barricades on the Ashulia-EPZ highway, disrupting traffic movement for about eight hours. They damaged and set fire to several vehicles.

According to witnesses, hundreds of workers at Universal Garments gathered in front of the factory at Zamagarah at about 10:30am to press home their 11 demands, including payment of three months' salary and overtime bills.

'The authorities closed the factory on May 16, without paying our dues and saying they would settle the dues on Sunday,' a supervisor of the factory said. 'However, when we came to work on Sunday, we were told that the factory was closed.'

'The authorities refused to talk about the payment of arrears and musclemen of the owner assaulted some of us when wanted to know when the factory would open,' he added.

Enraged, the workers took it out on several factories, including NASA Group, Meddler Group, Hamim Group, Sharmin Garments Limited, Nurjahan Fashion, Dada Garments, Shaheen Fashion, Palmal Group and Ring Sing Garments.

Within a few minutes, workers of other factories joined their colleagues at Universal Garments. They tried to break into Bandu Garments factory but, as the security guards resisted, they set it on fire at about 12:15pm.

They also set fire to seven staff buses and two private cars of the factory. The fire fighters were still to douse the flame at 6:00pm.

The situation deteriorated when the angry workers tried to enter different factories and locked in clashes with the security men.

The police swung into action in a bid to bring the situation under control but only managed to add fuel to the fire.

'The workers started hurling stones at the lawmen,' said a resident of the area. 'The police fired 25 teargas canisters to disperse the workers.'

Witnesses said the workers chased the policemen and damaged more than 25 vehicles of the Savar EPZ.

At one stage, workers from different factories joined in and the entire area turned into a battlefield.

The workers then ran towards the New Savar EPZ and forced open the main gate at around 12:45pm.

As the demonstrators turned violent, the Ansars of the New EPZ opened fire, leaving at least seven persons injured.

Badsha and Harun were admitted to Dhaka Medical College Hospital in a critical condition.

After the firing, the workers entered the New EPZ and damaged 65 more garments factories.

They damaged furniture and machineries of some factories. During the clashes some miscreants engaged in a looting spree.

The news of the firing added fuel to the agitation and the workers continued to damage and ransack factories and entered into the Old EPZ, where more than 50 local and foreign factories are located.

They damaged and ransacked most of the factories and damaged more than 25 vehicles.

The police then stormed into the old EPZ and started beating up the workers. Police reinforcements from Dhaka and Mymensingh arrived at around 6:30pm.

## **Production suspended at Bangladesh EPZ following workers' riot**

By Nazrul Islam, Dhaka, May 23 (ANI): Authorities suspended work at the factories in the Dhaka Export Processing Zone for a day after workers clashed with agents of garment factory owners and the police on Monday over non-payment of wages.

The workers set two garment factories on fire and more than 100 others in and outside the exclusive zone at Zamagarah in the suburban Savar, 18 kilometres off the capital city.

More than 300 vehicles were also damaged during the clash, which originated from Universal Garments Limited, after the owner of the factory failed to meet the deadline for payment of workers' salary.

The workers are said to be unpaid for three months.

Two major roads – Ashulia and Ziarabo – remained closed as the trouble, which started at around 10:30am, spilled into the old and new export processing zones.

A garment worker was claimed to have been shot dead by members of the Bangladesh Ansars, and more than 200 people were injured.

The Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association expressed concern at repeated attacks on garment factories and urged the government to enhance security at every factory across the country.

"A vested interested group has been trying to destroy the sector, which contributes 76 per cent of the foreign exchange to the national economy," the association said in a statement.

Nazma Binte Alamgir, official spokesperson of the Bangladesh Export Processing Zone Authority, told ANI that the operation of the EPZ would remain suspended on Tuesday. She said the violence erupted from outside the EPZ and none of the EPZ workers were involved in the violent attacks.

The garment workers, meanwhile, announced work stoppage at garment factories in Savar in protest against the attack on them.

The workers put up barricades on the Ashulia-EPZ highway, disrupting traffic movement for about eight hours. They damaged and set fire to several vehicles.

According to witnesses, several hundred workers at Universal Garments gathered in front of the factory at Zamagarah at about 10:30am to press home their 11 demands, including payment of three months' salary and overtime bills.

"The authorities closed the factory on May 16, without paying our dues and saying they would settle the dues on Sunday," a supervisor of the factory said.

"However, when we came to work on Sunday, we were told that the factory was closed," he said adding that the authorities refused to talk about the payment of arrears and musclemen of the owner assaulted some of us when wanted to know when the factory would open.

Enraged, the workers took it out on several factories, and workers from those factories come out within few minutes, and started agitation, which turned into clashes and spread all over the industrial belt. The fierce clashes continued until the night.

The police swung into action in a bid to bring the situation under control but only managed to add fuel to the fire.

Witnesses said the workers chased the policemen and damaged vehicles on the highway, turning the areas into a real battlefield.

Additional police were deployed in the night.

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<http://www.alertnet.org/thenews/newsdesk/DHA99797.htm>

## **Protesting Bangladesh workers burn factories**

23 May 2006 06:24:03 GMT

Source: Reuters

DHAKA, May 23 (Reuters) - Thousands of protesting workers in Bangladesh set fire to at least six garment factories after at least one of their colleague was killed and scores were injured in clashes with police, witnesses and police said on Tuesday.

They said more than 100 vehicles were damaged in the violence that first erupted on Monday in and around capital Dhaka after police called in by factory owners tried to break demonstrations by workers demanding higher pay and benefits.

Agitated workers set fire on Monday to three factories in an export zone in Savar, about 25 km (15 miles) north of Dhaka. Later, they barricaded a highway and attacked buses and trucks.

The violence spread to other areas overnight when thousands of workers armed with sticks and stones attacked factories in the city's Uttara, Mirpur and Tejgaon areas and its suburbs.

"The violence is still spreading and it might be worsen," a police officer said.

Fire engines could be seen racing through Dhaka's crowded streets on Tuesday.

"We are battling fire in at least half a dozen spots right now," a fire fighter said by telephone.

Authorities had called in riot police to try and bring the situation under control, officials said, after about 100 people, including police, were injured in the clashes.

Garments are impoverished Bangladesh's biggest export, fetching the country more than \$6 billion a year. The industry employs nearly 2 million workers.

Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association expressed concern over the worsening law and order.

"This is part of a conspiracy to ruin the nation's economy," it said in a statement.

Bangladesh is already reeling under widespread civil unrest over nagging shortages of electricity and drinking water for months.

(Additional reporting by Masud Karim)

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<http://english.aljazeera.net/NR/exeres/316FB961-C7D4-4661-B80A-26446ADBDA3B.htm>

## **Dhaka textile workers intensify protest**

by

Tuesday 23 May 2006 7:18 AM GMT

**Thousands of workers in Bangladesh have set fire to at least six garment factories in a second day of protests after a man was killed and scores more injured in clashes with police**

Witnesses and police said more than 100 vehicles were damaged in the violence that started on Monday in and around the capital, Dhaka, after police called in by factory owners tried to break up demonstrations by workers demanding higher pay and benefits.

About 20,000 protesters, carrying bamboo sticks and chanting slogans, burnt the factories at Ashulia, north of the capital, as police fired tear gas to disperse them, police officer Shahedur Rahman said.



**Workers set fire to vehicles and clashed with police**

Workers from the districts of Tejgaon, Mirpur, Uttara and Wari in Dhaka, came out onto the streets on Tuesday demanding better pay and overtime, as well as a mandatory weekly holiday.

They clashed with police and attacked several factories before blocking roads and bringing city traffic to a virtual standstill, the Dhaka police said.

AP reported that one protester, known only as Rana, 20, died on Tuesday of a gunshot wound to the back.

### **Worsening violence**

A senior police official said Monday's protests saw at least 30 factories ransacked and dozens of vehicles smashed. Police had rescued a factory owner from the mob.

A police officer said: "The violence is still spreading and it might worsen."

One fire fighter said: "We are battling fires in at least half a dozen spots."

The authorities had called in riot police to try to bring the situation under control, officials said, after about 100 people including police were injured in the clashes.

Clothes are Bangladesh's biggest export, fetching the country more than \$6 billion a year. The industry employs nearly two million people.

Bangladesh has more than 4,200 garment factories.

### **Agencies**

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[http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/05/23/AR2006052300486\\_pf.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/05/23/AR2006052300486_pf.html)

## **Bangladeshi Workers Torch More Factories**

By JULHAS ALAM

The Associated Press

Tuesday, May 23, 2006; 3:22 PM

SAVAR, Bangladesh -- Angry garment workers set fire to seven textile factories in and around the capital Tuesday after news that an employee shot in the back during recent protests over better pay and working conditions had died, officials and witnesses said.

The 20-year-old man, identified only as Rana, was one of about 100 people injured Monday when thousands of textile workers clashed with factory guards and security forces, police official Kamrul Islam said.

News of his death sparked more violence as thousands of textile workers took to the streets in Savar, an industrial zone near Dhaka, and the scene of Monday's clashes, witnesses said.

Mobs of angry workers, many of them armed with iron rods and sticks, set fire to at least seven factories in Savar and Dhaka, according to private TV channel ATN Bangla.

Dozens of people were injured as security forces swung batons to try to prevent the rampaging workers from smashing and burning passing vehicles, said Nazmul Huda, a local reporter in Savar. The protesters also blocked the roads with pieces of scrap metal, he said.

The protests spread to the capital, where workers blocked busy roads and ransacked several factories \_ looting buildings and burning cars \_ in an industrial area in downtown Dhaka. They also threw stones at police and firefighters who tried to control the situation, according to ATN Bangla.

The protests created huge traffic snarls in Dhaka, a city of 10 million people, and its neighboring areas.

On Monday, workers set fire to two factories and several buses in Savar during a protest to demand better pay and working conditions, police and witnesses said.

At least 100 people, including several police, were injured when factory guards and riot police intervened to disperse the protesters, witnesses said.

Rampaging workers also damaged several buses and cars after barricading a major highway to the capital, and ransacked dozens of smaller factories, police officer Jamiruddin Sheikh said.

The workers started demonstrating after authorities failed to meet their demands, which include higher wages and benefits, one day off per week and an end to forced overtime, said labor leader Belayet Hossain.

Workers are often forced to work seven days a week or late into the night to meet production deadlines, Hossain added.

"We have joined the protest as we are paid pittance for our hard work," said Kamal Hussain, a garment worker who was demonstrating with about 100 others in Uttara, just outside Dhaka.

A textile worker earns about \$22 a month in Bangladesh. Hossain said they were seeking at least a 30 percent raise.

The rioting apparently started when authorities at some factories tried to stop their workers from joining the unscheduled protest.

Some workers also alleged that the protesters attacked their factories and beat them up for refusing to join in the demonstration, worker Lailee Begum said.

Textile factory owners, meanwhile, launched their own demonstration in downtown Dhaka to protest Monday's incident and demand better security for their factories.

The owners blamed a motivated section of workers for instigating the violence, and urged authorities to deploy the army at factories and investigate the attacks, according to the Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association.

Several factories that mostly make garments for export were shut down following the rioting, and extra police were deployed in the area.

Meanwhile, the government promised better security for the factories.

"The government will do whatever necessary for the protection of the garment industry," junior Interior Minister Lutfuzzaman Babar said after Tuesday's violence.

Bangladesh has about 2,500 garment factories employing about 1.8 million workers, mostly women.

The impoverished country earns about \$6 billion annually from textile exports, mainly to the United States and Europe, according to Bangladesh's Export Promotion Bureau.

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<http://www.allheadlinenews.com/articles/7003688874>

## **Agitated Garment Workers Paralyze Dhaka**

May 23, 2006 8:30 p.m. EST

Siddique Islam - All Headline News Foreign Correspondent

Dhaka, Bangladesh (AHN) - Thousands of garments workers on Tuesday torched several factories, vehicles and clashed with police largely paralyzing life in Bangladesh capital and its outskirts on the second day of the violent demonstrations spreading to the capital city.

Agitation of the workers for due wages and other demands turned wild on the day as they set fire to factories and vehicles and blocked roads in Dhaka and suburban industrial belts, forcing closure of several hundreds apparel factories, sources concerned said.

The apparently uncontrolled agitators torched at least five more garment units and attacked nearly a dozen others and smashed several hundred vehicles to press home their 11-point demands.

Sources in the Fire Brigade said four garment factories were set on fire in Ashulia, a industrial area, alone, another one was set ablaze in Gazipur while a blade factory was torched in Tejgaon in Dhaka.

Meanwhile, authorities concerned called out paramilitary Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) troops and elite Rapid Action Battalion (RAB) to join police in riot gears to tame the agitators as they went wild damaging vehicles and other industrial units and setting fire on fire engines that tried to make their way to the burning factories.

Apparel producers and different trade bodies' leaders at an emergency press briefing on Tuesday urged the nation to unite against the conspiracy that has created an 'anarchic' situation to destroy the garment sector and national economy.

They also urged the government to take immediate action 'anyway' to bring the law and order situation under control to ensure peaceful operation of all the industrial units from Wednesday.

# The Daily Star

Committed to PEOPLE'S RIGHT TO KNOW

Wed. May 24, 2006

Front Page

## Black Tuesday for industry

RMG labour violence spreads to Dhaka; 1 killed; over 250 factories vandalised, scores torched; 200 vehicles ransacked; 100 injured

Star Report



Torched Little Star (Diamond) Spinning Mill at Savar in roaring flames along with piles of threads on the factory premises yesterday.  
PHOTO: SK Enamul Haq

One person was killed and at least 100 people were injured while over 250 factories and 200 vehicles were ransacked yesterday, as garment workers in tens of thousands rampaged through the city and its suburbs to press home their 11-point demand.

Swapan, 30, a worker of China Garments at Boardbazar in Gazipur, succumbed to his injuries at Dhaka Medical College Hospital at 12:35am today. He was injured as his co-workers beat him up at the factory at 2:30pm yesterday, his cousin Selim told reporters at the hospital.

The workers ran amok on streets, ransacking and setting fire to garment plants, other industrial units, and vehicles, besides some business establishments and a few houses along the Dhaka-Mymensingh Highway.

The violence that erupted Monday in Savar and Gazipur aggravated and fanned out to Uttara, Mirpur, Kafrul, Tejgaon, and Old Dhaka.

The riot froze vehicular traffic from about 8am to 1pm on a number of city thoroughfares including the Farmgate-Mirpur and Farmgate-Uttara roads, Kazi Nazrul Islam Avenue, and those in Mohakhali and Gulshan areas, trapping thousands of commuters.

Besides, the road link of the capital with the northern region via Mymensingh remained snapped for the first half of the day.

Twenty policemen were among the injured in yesterday's riots and arson. And at least 500 garment plants put up the shutters.

A large number of police, Rab and Ansar contingents have been deployed in the city areas having high concentration of garments factories.

A leader of Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA) said 300 garment factories including 21 of Dhaka EPZ in Savar were damaged in the two-day chaos and vandalism, causing a loss of no less than Tk 400 crore to the garment businesses.

The BGMEA filed a case with Ashulia Police Station yesterday accusing six garment workers of instigating the riot and rampage. The police arrested over 100 garment workers in Gazipur, Savar, and Sripur in this connection.

## **SAVAR**

About 50 factories and 30 vehicles including one belonging to the fire service were vandalised or burnt in Savar yesterday.

The workers agitating to realise 11 demands including better wage and payment of arrears set four more garment factories ablaze for continuing with production yesterday. Two factories were burnt in the area the day before.

The violence broke out at Chitrashile in Gazirhat at 9am with frenzied workers setting fire to Little Star Knitting Industry Ltd. The demonstrators said the factory management forced its workers to work night shift Monday and did not show any "sympathy for or respect to" their demands.

Over 50 people including some policemen were injured in sporadic clashes between police and thousand of workers during the four-hour bedlam from 9:00am. Police lobbed 10 to 15 teargas shells and charged baton to disperse the demonstrating workers.

The mobs of workers also beat up five journalists and put up barricades on Dhaka-Aricha and Dhaka-Tongi-Ashulia-EPZ highways disrupting traffic movement. All shops and offices on both sides of the highways remained closed.

When the workers put Little Star Knitting Industry on fire, law enforcers including Rab lobbed teargas canisters at 10:30am to disperse them, triggering a series of chases and counter-chases.

A fire service vehicle was set ablaze when it attempted to extinguish the fire of the factory. Workers assaulted a reporter of Bangladesh Television and Manikganj correspondent of the daily Prothom Alo received head injury.

At 9:15am, the agitators ransacked an underconstruction factory of Mascot Group and set fire to some of its parts, as security guards locked in an altercation with them over continuing with production.



Three of the guards -- Saiful Islam, Abdur Rahim and Shib Shankar -- were stabbed, while a private university student was injured here. The demonstrators also set fire to the guards' shelter and office.

As police took position at all intersections leading to the highways, workers in groups vandalised at least 10 vehicles. They pelted brickbats at the law enforcers, who charged baton and lobbed teargas shells in return.

At 10:00am, the workers set fire to P&D Attires at Jamgora after the guards on duty fired two blank shots to prevent workers from entering the factory.

At 11:30am, a band of 40 to 50 unidentified workers wearing green helmets and black T-shirts set fire to Universe Knitting Industries Ltd at Jamgora, locals and law enforcers said. Some workers also looted various goods from the factory.

Garment workers also attacked and injured daily Ittefaq Senior Photo-journalist Mohammad Alam and Mahabub Matin of Chanel i. They also beat up daily Jugantor Photo-journalist Aminul Islam and snatched his camera and cellphone.

Three fire-fighting units led by Selim Nawaz Bhuyian reached the scene at noon and started working to douse the roaring flames. A large contingent of police was deployed in the area, while Rab patrol cars patrolled the highway.

The agitating workers also ransacked the factories in Ashulia Road, Shimoltola, Zirabo, and adjacent areas. The factories damaged include Shine Embroidery, Five Brothers Designwear, Nile Knitwear, Continental Garments, Pickard, Active Composite, Irish Garment, Southern Garments, Annyesha Style, a factory of Sharmin Group, Designtex, and Leatherex Footwear.

All activities in Dhaka Export Processing Zone (DEPZ) came to a halt on Monday after the EPZ authorities called a two-day shutdown.

A large number of police, armed police, and Rab were deployed in and around DEPZ and on Dhaka-Aricha highway beside the EPZ. Rab members were closely guarding the DEPZ main gates and allowed no one including the journalists to enter the area. Almost every factory set up a notice at its entrance reading "factory closed".

## **TONGI & GAZIPUR**

Several thousand garments workers yesterday vandalised vehicles and roadside establishments from one end to the other end of Tongi upazila and kept the Tongi-Gazipur road blocked for several hours.

More than a thousand workers gathered in Tongi College Gate area at about 8:00am and launched the mayhem, witnesses said.

Chanting slogans against the garment factory owners, they ransacked scores of vehicles plying the Dhaka-Mymensingh Highway, creating panic among the commuters and markets in the adjacent areas.

The angry mob set six vehicles of Nippon Garments Industries Ltd on and vandalised machinery of TLRA Holdings Ltd in Tongi.

The management of some factories alleged some "external terrorists" broke into their factories at about 9:00am and started the rampage.

Police and Rab members later charged batons to clear the highway and took control of it at about noon.

Duty Officer Jinat at Tongi Police Station admitted the widescale vandalism but could not give details about any casualties. "Only two garment factories and several owners of vehicles reported attacks on them to the police station," she told The Daily Star.

In Gazipur, workers vandalised a number of garment plants, over a hundred vehicles and looted some shops and houses, our correspondent reports.

Police arrested Garments Workers Oikya Forum President Moshrefa Mishu at Chandina intersection.

Five left-leaning parties had called a hartal in the district yesterday, protesting the killing of a garment worker at Sripur. Police arrested more than 100 workers during picketing.

Our Mymensingh correspondent reports the road communication between Dhaka and Mymensingh remained suspended from early morning yesterday.

## **UTTARA**

Around 500 workers baricaded the Mymensingh Road near Rajlaxmi Shopping Complex, Amir Complex, and Abdullahpur at about 9:00am, disrupting traffic until 1:00pm.

Police charged batons on them at about 10:00am.

During the clash with the police and Rab, the workers vandalised vehicles and some shops of the shopping complexes. They also set fire to a vehicle at Abdullahpur bus stand.

Hundreds of vehicles got stuck in the airport area causing trouble to thousands of commuters.

Officer-in-Charge Akhtaruz-zaman of Uttara Police Station told The Daily Star that the communication became normal after 1:00pm.

At least 50 workers were injured in Uttara and Tongi but no one was held, said police sources.

## **MIRPUR**

Agitating workers partially damaged more than 40 garment units and 10 cars including a Volvo double-decker. During the three-hour long clashes on the Begum Rokeya Sarani and at sections one and six of Mirpur and Pallabi, 15 people were injured.

Around 4,000 workers took part in the procession at 9:30am chanting slogans for increasing their wages. The furious workers threw brickbats at the glass walls of roadside establishments including banks, Chinese restaurants, community centres and other business units.

Witnesses said, the workers of SQ Sweaters Ltd, another unit of SQ Fashion of Maona Sripur, declared a programme on Monday evening protesting the incidents at Savar and Gazipur.

At 8:30am, the workers of SQ Sweaters at Sheorapara brought out a procession and started heading towards Pallabi where they met another group of workers. The procession went to different factories calling the workers out to join them.

The management of different factories shut down their factories within 11:00am for indefinite time.

The traffic movement from Mirpur section 12 to Agargaon remained stalled from the morning to 1:00pm.

### **TEJGAON-MOHAKHALI**

Some garment workers brought out a procession at Tejgaon and called the workers of different garment factories. They threw brickbats and started vandalising cars.

They also tried to involve the workers of Samah Razor Blade Factory in the movement but failed. The agitating workers then committed an arson on the factory. They also set fire to eight cars parked on its premises.

Another car was burnt in front of the National Shooting Complex at Gulshan at noon.

Police, Rab, and Ansars were deployed in the area at noon to bring the situation under control.

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<http://www.newagebd.com/2006/may/24/front.html#1>

### **Labour unrest spills into capital, outskirts**

*More factories damaged; BDR deployed;  
BGMEA threatens with indefinite closure  
Staff Correspondent*



*Garment workers agitating for their demands after Monday's clash at and around the export processing zone at Savar set fire to Diamond Garments at Savar on Tuesday, top; the police rout the agitators during a demonstration in Dhaka, bottom left; and the garment factory owners lie on the road going by the Sonargaon Hotel, bottom right, in protest at the workers' attack on garment units.*

*— New Age and AFP photos*

More readymade garment factories and vehicles were damaged on Tuesday, as labour unrest, which originated near the Dhaka export processing zone in Savar on Monday, spilled into the capital city.

The paramilitary Bangladesh Rifles were called in, as workers went on the rampage for the second day straight. There were also reports of looting of machinery and other goods from some factories.

The Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association convened an emergency meeting in the afternoon and threatened to shut down readymade garment factories indefinitely, if the government failed to control within five hours.

Incidents of violence were reported from different places in and around the city, including Mirpur, Tejgaon, Mohakhali, Uttara, Wari and Tongi.

Workers went on the rampage in Gazipur as well, while violence continued for the second consecutive day at Ashulia, where the trouble began on Monday.

The capital city appeared in the middle of siege, as garment workers took to the street at about 8:30am, damaging and setting ablaze vehicles and factories.

Traffic on the Dhaka-Ashulia and Dhaka-Mymensingh highways came to a halt, as the workers put up barricades at different places. Services on half of the long routes remained suspended till 2:00pm because of the violence.

Higher secondary certificate examinees had a rough day, negotiating the trouble spots. Many examinees could not reach examination centres on time.

At Ashulia, thousands of garment workers set ablaze four garment factories and two vehicles, including a fire engine, near the Dhaka export processing zone in Savar on the Tongi-Ashulia Road.

They took to the street at 8:30am and brought out a procession, blocking the Tongi-Ashulia connecting road and the Zirabo Road, in protest against Monday's attack.

Splitting into small groups, the workers stormed into Little Star Spinning Mills of Diamond Textile at Baipail at around 9:00am and set fire to the factory in front of the law enforcers.

As the fire fighters rushed to the spot, the angry workers also set fire to a fire fighting vehicle bearing number Dhaka-Metro-Na-8489.

Meanwhile, some workers entered the Bake Dyeing of Lusaka Group and vandalised it. They set fire to a factory of Muscat Group, Shad Garments, Pet Fashion and Universe Knitting.

The workers alleged that the factory owner continued the nightshift after a violent incident in the adjoining areas but the factory authorities claimed that they had suspended operational activities since Monday noon.

They assaulted some photojournalists and set fire to a motorbike of Mohammad Alam, a senior photojournalist of the daily Ittefaq.

At Mirpur, several hundred workers assembled in front of a sweater factory of SQ Group at Shewrapara at about 8:30am and brought out a procession after a brief rally. They turned violent when the procession came under attack by the police at the Agargaon link road crossing.

The agitated workers started pelting brickbats at the police and at the same time to the buildings along Roquia Sarani, stretching from Agargaon Link Road to Section 12 in Pallabi.

Taking full control of the road, the agitators also damaged more than 20 vehicles, including two state-owned BRTC Volvo buses.

The agitators also damaged vehicles along the road from Section 10 to Section 1 roundabouts and towards Section 13 in Kafrul.

A huge contingent of the police, the Rapid Action Battalion and the Bangladesh Rifles personnel brought the situation under control.

At Tejgaon, several hundred youths attacked the Samah Razor Blade Factory, a concern of the GMG Group, after failing to bring out workers from the factory.

The rioting group entered the factory premises breaking open a portion of the gate and set fire to eight vehicles parked inside and at the gate of the factory. They also looted valuable machineries and other goods from the factory building.

The factory manager for production, Abdur Razzak Khan, claimed the attackers had damaged and looted machines worth over Tk 10 crore.

The agitators also vandalised garment factories and set fire to vehicles in front of the National Shooting Complex at Gulshan, Bengal Garments at Abdullahpur in Uttara and Wari.

In Gazipur, left leaning workers' organisations enforced a daylong strike to protest against the police action on workers of FS Sweaters at Sripur and Universe Knitting at Jamgara and the police harassment.

The agitating workers vandalised over 100 garment factories, more than 300 vehicles and a number of shops and houses between Tongi and the Chandana square.

They also looted valuables during the vandalism while the police detained more than 50 pickets, including the chairperson of the Garment Sramik Oikya Forum, Moshrefa Mishu.

In Narayanganj, several thousand workers of three garment factories at Khadum under Roopganj upazila took to the street and vandalised Sharif Melamine Factory.

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## **RMG owners want army to guard factories**

*Find no workers involved*

Staff Correspondent

Readymade garment manufacturers on Tuesday accused the administration of taking no action against the ongoing unrest by workers and warned that the apparel industry would be shut down indefinitely, if the government failed to ensure security at their factories.

Along with leaders of other businesses, they urged the government for immediate deployment of members of the armed forces to protect the industries from massive destructions by 'miscreants dictated by a vested quarter', who they claimed had waged a war against the economy. Many a leader also asserted that there were hardly any workers involved in the agitations, claiming that the conspirators from home and abroad were behind the massive destructions.

The Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association will hold a meeting of factory owners in the BIAM auditorium on Wednesday to decide whether they will shut down garment factories across the country for an indefinite period.

'We will decide tomorrow about shutting down factories across the country for an indefinite period,' the BGMEA vice-president, Abdus Salam Murshedy, said when talking to journalists at his office.

Business leaders from different sectors assembled there to voice their concern at the ongoing unrest.

Salam alleged that the factory did not receive any protection from the government despite repeated requests.

'Conspirators have started a war against the garment industry and economy,' Abdul Awal Mintoo, a former president of the Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry, said. 'Why the government is not stopping this anarchy?'

The president of the International Chamber of Commerce and Industry said apparently a foreign hand was working behind the anarchy. 'It is a calculated move against Bangladesh's garment industry.'

The president of the Metropolitan Chamber of Commerce and Industry said it is the duty of intelligence agencies to identify the vested interest groups and take strongest possible actions against anarchy.

'We want deployment of army at all garment locations by tonight to restore security of workers, owners and properties,' said Fazlul Hoque, president of the Bangladesh Knitwear Manufacturers and Exporters Association, at an emergency press conference at the association's office.

Showing a fax message his association received at 11.30am from a member factory, Tasmia Fabrics, at Gazipur, which read, 'SOS! We are under attack', Hoque said the total industry was under attack.

During the two days of unrest by agitated workers, more than 200 factories have been destroyed. The damager, according to preliminary estimate, could run up to more than Tk 1,000 crore, he said.

At a meeting at the BGMEA in the morning, some garment owners said they want actions immediately and blasted law enforcers for failing to prevent destruction of factories.

‘The home minister has said several times that he is taking actions but we see no action,’ one garment owner shouted.

Some garment owners blasted the media, alleging that a section of the press misreported about non-payment of wages in garment factories.

‘We can challenge the media: Please find out one factory among the vandalised ones that has unsettled wages.

All the good and compliant factories are being destroyed,’ said one garment owner, who was eventually cut short by Shahidul Hoque Litu, a BGMEA vice-president.

Atiqul Islam said, ‘When miscreants are destructing our factories, neither the government nor the opposition is coming to save us.’

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## **Govt suspects role of local, foreign instigators**

Shahidul Islam Chowdhury

The government believes a vested quarter at home and abroad was active behind the attacks on garment factories in and around the capital in the past two days to create anarchy and hamper the growth of the RMG sector.

‘A vested quarter at home and abroad planned the ransacking of garment industries to create an anarchic situation and hamper the growth of the sector,’ the local government, rural development and cooperatives minister, Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan, said at a press briefing on Tuesday evening.

Genuine garment workers were not engaged in the violence, he added.

A host of leaders from the ruling BNP and a number of ministers called on him at his office throughout the day and ventilated their anxiety over the situation at a time when the prime minister was abroad.

The prime minister, Khaleda Zia, who is now in Abu Dhabi, talked to the senior ministers and gave necessary directives over telephone.

At the press briefing, when elaborating on ‘the vested quarter at home’, Mannan Bhuiyan said a section of the opposition political parties was active behind the violent activities.

He did not, however, specify what he meant by the vested quarters abroad. ‘A neighbouring country, which is a competitor of our products in the global garment market, might have been behind the violence,’ he said.

Earlier, he had a series of meetings with key ministers, leaders of the Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association, a section of leaders of garment workers and some of his political aides.

He warned that the image of the country as a good producer of garment products would be hampered, if the violence continued.

Mannan Bhuiyan, also secretary general of the ruling BNP, called upon all quarters, including the political parties, entrepreneurs, professional bodies and labour leaders, to work together against the violence.

About inactive role of the police in the past two days, he said the police were asked to exercise restraint.

He admitted that the government did not think that violence would spread on Tuesday but said it would take appropriate measures to protect life and property.

About the garment owners’ demand to deploy army to protect the industries, he said the government deployed adequate police, Rapid Action Battalion and Bangladesh Rifles personnel to protect industries.

Earlier in the morning, Mannan Bhuiyan summoned the commerce and water resources minister, Hafiz Uddin Ahmed, the Dhaka City Corporation mayor Sadeque Hossain Khoka, the housing and public works minister, Mirza Abbas, the fisheries and livestock minister, Abdullah Al Noman, the

state minister for home affairs, Lutfozzaman Babar, and the state minister for labour and employment, Aman Ullah Aman, to his office for consultation.

The food and disaster management minister, Chowdhury Kamal Ibne Yusuf, the prime minister's political secretary, Harris Chowdhury, and a number of BNP lawmakers and leaders rushed to Mannan Bhuiyan's office Tuesday morning.

In the meetings, some BNP leaders and lawmakers complained that the police were inactive in most of the places of occurrence.

Babar, however, denied the allegation.

After the meeting, Hafiz Uddin Ahmed said the attacks were 'intentional' when a delegation of German investors was visiting the country.

At 2:15pm, a group of business leaders met Mannan Bhuiyan to express their helplessness and to seek security for the industries.

Bangladesh Textile Mills Association president MA Awal, former BGMEA presidents Anisur Rahman Sinha, Redwan Ahmed and Kazi Moniruzzaman, former Dhaka Chamber of Commerce and Industries president Saiful Islam and Bangladesh Chamber of Industries president AK Azad led the delegation.

'We demanded stern action against anarchists. We demanded deployment of army,' Abdul Awal told journalists.'

Mentioning inaction of the police, Anisur Rahman Sinha said, 'It's time to act. What is the use of holding a gun and be an spectator of violent acts?'

The government has to protect industries, he asserted.

Seeking security, Redwan Ahmed told the minister, 'Please protect us. We are in crisis.'

In the afternoon, a section of leaders of the garment factory workers met Mannan Bhuiyan and demanded action to realise their demands from the owners of the factories.

Montu Ghosh and Idris Ali led the workers delegation.

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## **Security tightened at Ctg garment factories**

Staff Correspondent . Chittagong

Security has been tightened at garment factories in the port city as panic gripped the apparel sector here following widespread labour unrest in Dhaka and other places, officials said.

Security forces intensified patrol at the industrial belts and the Chittagong Export Processing Zone with the deployment of elite Rapid Action Battalion (RAB), paramilitary BDR, riot police and the armed police battalion, they added. The commander of Chittagong RAB unit, Lt Col Hasinur Rahman, told New Age that over 300 troops of the battalion were already deployed to prevent possible violence at garment factories in Chittagong.

'Our troops are on alert at the industrial belts where garment factories are located and patrols have been intensified,' he said adding: 'we are monitoring situation at different garment factories so that nobody can create any trouble.'

'Besides, we've set up a special camp in Kalurghat industrial area to strengthen security,' he said adding that the battalion was keeping watch on all industrial areas here.

The assistant commissioner (detective branch) of the Chittagong Metropolitan Police, Mosharraf Hossain, informed newsmen that a large number of riot police in addition to the BDR and other forces were deployed at the sensitive points of the industrial belts where garment factories were located.

The first vice-president of the Chittagong unit of the BGMEA, MA Tayub, said: 'we've already taken precautionary measures as a panicky situation prevails at garment factories here.'

Over 500 garment factories are located in Chittagong, he informed newsmen.

## **Protesting Bangladeshi workers burn factories**

Published: Wednesday, 24 May, 2006, 10:27 AM Doha Time

By Mizan Rahman

**DHAKA: The government of Prime Minister Khaleda Zia yesterday called out paramilitary Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) troops to quell violent rioting by garment workers in and around the capital.**

A total of 48 platoons of BDR were deployed in Gazipur, Ashulia, Uttara, Mirpur, Tejgaon, Rampura and other places where most garment factories are located as rioting spread through the areas in a burst of backlash to Monday's Dhaka export processing zone (EPZ) clashes that left two workers dead.



The deployment came as Prime Minister Khaleda Zia yesterday left for the United Arab Emirates on a two-day state visit.

Marauders set fire to or ransacked numerous factories and cars as the industrial riot spread from Savar, north of Dhaka city, through the apparel hubs in the capital and its outskirts yesterday in a dangerous backlash as another worker died following Monday's EPZ mayhem.

Hospital sources identified the victim as Rana, 20, who died at Dhaka Medical College Hospital early yesterday, stoking up the unrest prevailing since Monday's clashes.

Another worker died on Monday night. They were among over 100 people, including workers and law-enforcers, injured in massive violence in and outside Dhaka Export Processing Zone at Savar.

"The capital looked like caught in a deadlock as the enraged garment workers took to the street at about 8:30am at different points of the city and went on the rampage damaging or setting fire to vehicles and factories," a firsthand account said.

They set fire to 17 vehicles, including two imposing modern Volvo double-deckers, at Mirpur, Pallabi and Kafrul - and the orgies fast spread like forest fires to other labour-intensive areas in and around the capital.

A number of people, including Kafrul police station officer-in-charge of police, were injured during the violent demonstrations as the protestors, armed with stones and sticks, clashed with the law-enforcers.

In a scene of vandalism many said never ever before seen in this country's productive arena, a band of rioters also attacked Samah Razor Blade factory in Tejgaon industrial area at about 10:30am, damaged and set ablaze its machinery and looted valuable machines.

Before leaving the wrecked factory, they also set fire to eight cars parked on the premises of the industrial unit.

Factory Manager (Procurement) Mozammel claimed the attackers damaged and looted machines



worth over 200mn taka.

Another car was burnt in front of National Shooting Complex at Gulshan at noon.

As anarchy reigned supreme, traffic on Savar-Ashulia and Dhaka-Mymensingh highways came to a halt as the workers put up barricades at different places on the busy routes. That virtually turned Dhaka into a besieged city.

Sufferings of the Higher Secondary Certificate examinees knew no bounds as roads to the exam centers were blockaded for long hours. Many of them could not reach their exam centers in time.

In Gazipur, unruly demonstrators set three garment factories ablaze and damaged about 10 other factories and at least 100 vehicles.

Some 20-kilometre stretch from Konabari to Duttapara on the highway looked like a "veritable battlefield" as the garment workers and law-enforcers chased each other, leaving over 100 injured.

In a desperate cry for safety and security of their businesses the garment-factory owners and exporters also came out on the street and began squatting at the crossroads near Sonargaon Hotel in Dhaka city. They demanded "immediate deployment of army" to face the exigencies.

The current spate of violence started off with FS Sweater factory at Gazipur a few days back, where one worker was killed in police firing during massive unrest.

The entrepreneurs lamented that the sudden outburst of unrest dealt a deadlier blow to Bangladesh's main export-earning sector-readymade garments-than the one stemming from quota abolition through the expiry of MFA on the international market.

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<http://www.thedailystar.net/2006/05/25/d6052501011.htm>

# The Daily Star

**Committed to PEOPLE'S RIGHT TO KNOW**

Thu. May 25, 2006

## **Tight security reins back workers' rage**

*Demonstrators still damage 5 Gazipur units; tripartite meeting decides to form Wage Commission*  
Star Report

Situation in the capital and its outskirts yesterday mainly remained calm, with exceptions of incidents of ransacking at five factories in Gazipur amid deployment of a large number of law enforcers after two-day of vandalism by protesters.

Most of the garment and other factories in the city yesterday remained closed for the third consecutive day while factories in Gazipur have been closed since Saturday. No untoward incident occurred in the city yesterday.

Meanwhile, the government decided to form a "wage commission" for the garment sector to fix minimum wages for the workers soon, an Information Department press release said.

The decision was taken at a meeting of leaders of Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA), leaders of garment workers and government high-ups with State Minister for Labour and Employment Amanullah Aman in the chair.

Fisheries and Livestock Minister Abdullah Al Noman and senior leaders of different labour organisations were present at the meeting held in the labour ministry's conference room.

Condemning the attacks on garment factories on Monday and Tuesday, the meeting also decided to compensate the workers affected by the incidents and make an inventory of the damages done to garment factories.

A joint statement made at the meeting said, "The workers involved in the movement would not be sacked."

It was also decided that all closed factories will resume operation, the arrested garment workers and leaders will be released and cases in this connection will be withdrawn immediately.

A good number of workers of the vandalised factories in Savar were seen roaming near their workplaces yesterday to know when those will resume production while many male workers fled their houses fearing arrest.

The BGMEA and Bangladesh Knitwear Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BKMEA) asked the workers to join work from today. Dhaka Export Processing Zone (EPZ) will also resume production in its factories today.

Around 10,000 law enforcers, including 30 platoons of Bangladesh Rifles, around 800 Rapid Action Battalion members, riot police and additional police forces were deployed in the city.

Police sources said deployment of intelligence forces have also been increased.

Visiting Mirpur, Tejgaon and Uttara areas, where protesting workers had vandalised factories and demonstrated on streets, The Daily Star correspondents found the areas calm. Law enforcers were seen patrolling the areas, as well as guarding some of the factories that were attacked on Tuesday.

Some protesting workers tried to bring out processions at several areas in the city including at Shewrapara, section No 14 in Mirpur, behind Purabi Cinema in Pallabi, and Rayerbagh bus stand in Demra yesterday morning but law enforcers foiled their attempts.

A total of nine cases were filed with Mirpur, Tejgaon and Kafrul police stations (PS) against several hundred named and unnamed workers in connection with Tuesday's rampage in the city.

Nine persons arrested in Mirpur and 11 each in Kafrul and Tejgaon on Tuesday, were produced before the court yesterday, who were later sent to jail.

No case was filed with Uttara and Sutrapur PSs.

### **Gazipur**

Several hundred workers yesterday demonstrated at Borobari area at 9:00am and vandalised Moonlight Garments factory. BDR and police later dispersed the protesters, a correspondent in Gazipur reports.

Several hundred demonstrators got on the Dhaka-Mymensingh highway at Salna and ransacked factories of Concord Garments, Utah Knitting, Quality Garments and Sang Kwang Apparels at about 11:00am.

Local people alleged that police stormed Salna village and indiscriminately beat up people, leaving at least 10 injured. One of them was admitted to Gazipur Sadar Hospital.

Rab helicopters flew over Gazipur twice in the morning while BDR, Rab and police were seen patrolling troubled spots, reports news agency UNB.

Vehicular traffic on the Dhaka-Mymensingh highway was thin with only a few vehicles seen on the road.

Meanwhile, 29 people including union leaders Mashrefa Mishu and six others, arrested on Tuesday from the district, were produced before court yesterday with a 10-day remand prayer. The court granted five-day for each of them.

Three policemen, who are in charge of Chandana, Konabari and Hotapara police outposts, filed three cases with Joydevpur PS against 2000 people.

## **SAVAR**

Uncertainty looms over the fates of thousands of workers outside Dhaka Export Processing Zone (DEPZ) as those have been declared closed for an indefinite period.

"We did not get last month's salary and fear we will have to fast in the coming days as we're running out of our savings," Halima, a finishing-section worker of Little Star Spinning Mills Ltd (LSSML), told this correspondent as she was standing outside the burnt factory building.

"We cannot even look for new jobs as all the factories here are closed indefinitely," a frustrated Halima said.

Meanwhile, some workers left their rented houses for their home villages Tuesday.

According to the workers, the situation is worst for the workers of six burnt factories.

Meantime, 12 platoons of BDR men, about 400 Rab members and large contingents of police have been deployed at all sensitive places in Ashulia and Savar including the DEPZ.

Fifty fire fighters were working in each shift at the burnt sites.

An uneasy calm is prevailing at the localities due to the fear of police harassment and arrest including in Zirabo, Zamgora, Gazirchat, Noroshingapur, Shimoltoly and Kathhgora where thousands of workers live.

Most of the workers did not come out of home yesterday as a rumour ran rife regarding an order to open of fire on any kind of demonstration.

A police van with 20 to 25 riot police on board was seen patrolling the two highways making announcements through bullhorns prohibiting people to hold any unnecessary gathering on any side of the highways and asking everyone to leave for respective destinations immediately.

Fire at LSSML was extinguished completely yesterday morning. "We hope to start again soon with all our former employees back to job. We have not estimated the amount of loss yet," said Md Ali Hossain, assistant manager of the factory.

State-run news agency BSS reports quoting a BEPZA news release that enterprises of DEPZ will resume normal operation today with full activities.

"The outsiders unlawfully forced in the Dhaka EPZ factories and ransacked 27 garment factories of Dhaka EPZ, set ablaze a Korean sweater factory, A-One (BD) Ltd and damaged several vehicles inside the Dhaka EPZ," added the release.



BDR personnel, *left*, stand guard at the entrance to Dhaka Export Processing Zone in Savar yesterday to ward off any untoward incident; a garment factory on Tongi-Ashulia Highway, *right*, remains closed after it came under attack on Tuesday. PHOTO: STAR

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<http://www.newagebd.com/2006/may/25/front.html#1>

## **Tight security brings uneasy calm at RMG flashpoints**

Arif Newaz Farazi

Uneasy calm prevailed on Wednesday in the industrial belt in Ashulia, Dhaka export processing zones and factories in Dhaka amid the presence of a huge number of law enforcers.

At least 70 factories, including 31 inside the exclusive zone, were vandalised during labour unrest on Monday and Tuesday over alleged irregularities in payment of wages and benefits.

Some 1,200 members of the Rapid Action Battalion, the paramilitary Bangladesh Rifles and the police have been deployed in the industrial belt to avert further violence, which has already killed two persons and injured more than 150.

The Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association announced Wednesday that the factories would resume operation on Thursday. The association also demanded a judicial inquiry into the widespread vandalism.

All kinds of activities remained suspended for the third consecutive day on Wednesday and the Bangladesh Export Zone Authority expected the activities to resume on Thursday.

'We hope to resume production on Thursday,' M Kamal Akhter, the BEPZA general manager, told New Age Wednesday noon. He said they were still assessing the loss during the rampage.

'There is no trouble inside the DEPZ between the workers and the management of the factories,' Kamal said.

Whenever a trouble arises, it is resolved through consultation with the worker's representative of the workers' council, he added.

He alleged that outsiders had vandalised 31 factories and 25 vehicles inside the DEPZ, most of them are of multinational companies.

Mohammad Nazrul Islam, a co-ordinator of the owners and workers' association, told New Age on Wednesday, 'We tried to solve the trouble after a discussion in presence of all groups.'

'If the authorities decided to resume operation from Thursday under vigilance of the law enforcers, we would announce the message through loudspeakers,' he added.

A high official of the Rapid Action Battalion said 2,500 members of the police, 240 members of the Bangladesh Rifles and 400 members of the battalion are patrolling Ashulia and DEPZ areas.

A huge contingent of law enforcers have been deployed in front of the all garments factories and the two main gates of the DEPZ. RAB helicopters were also seen patrolling.

Some frustrated male and female workers of the damaged factories were found roaming in front of their factories, fearing redundancy.

'We did not have any trouble regarding salaries and wages but some outsiders boarded on a truck



wearing green helmets and black T-shirts set fire to our factory on Tuesday,' Al-Amin, an operator of the Shad Garments at Jamagarah, said.

'Why would we vandalise our own factory as the authorities pay us regularly,' Nazim, a worker of the Bandhu Fashion Limited, told New Age. 'We have never seen the people, who set fire to our factory, in the DEPZ.'

The New Age correspondent reports from Gazipur correspondent that three cases were filed with the Joydevpur police station about Tuesday's mayhem.

Moshrefa Mishu, president of the Garments Oikya Forum, was the main accused of the cases.

She was arrested from the Chandana crossing on Tuesday and was remanded on Wednesday.

The police produced Mishu along with nine others before the Gazipur court seeking a 10-day remand. The court granted five-day remand for five persons, including Mishu.

Meanwhile, Fazle Rabbi, the deputy commissioner, and Atiqul Islam, the police superintendent, held a meeting with factory owners at Rupa Knitting factory, where the authorities decided to resume production on Thursday.

The workers' leaders gave a fresh five-day ultimatum for fixing the minimum wage at Tk 3,000. Otherwise, they threatened, a tough movement will be launched.

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## **BGMEA places proposals to ward off worker unrest**

Kazi Azizul Islam

Owners of readymade garment factories on Wednesday set forth a nine-point proposal to tackle the ongoing labour unrest, which they said had been 'instigated' for a 'planned destruction' of the largest industrial sector in Bangladesh.

The proposals are for continuation of production at their factories, institution of a judicial inquiry into the unrest to identify the 'plotters', immediate deployment of army at the factories for security, and formation of a control cell at the Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters' Association, involving representatives of different law-enforcement forces, to look out for, and deal with, disturbances in factories.

The owners renewed their opposition to the workers' rights to form trade union but acknowledged the need to develop the relations with the workers, suggesting formation of bipartisan committee at each factory to resolve disputes between workers and owners.

The proposals were formulated at a general meeting, organised by the association, in the BIAM auditorium in the capital city. Hundreds of factory owners, who are critical of the government for its failure to ensure their security, attended the meeting.

Former BGMEA presidents, including two lawmakers of the ruling BNP, addressed the meeting, which presided over by Abdus Salam Murshedy, a vice-president of the association.

Abu Tayeb, another BGMEA vice-president, read out the proposals, asking the government to form a one-member inquiry committee with a High Court judge to identify and punish the perpetrators of the destruction over the past three days.

The association directed its members to start production from Thursday and said the government will have to compensate if any factory is damaged again by the terrorists.

It said an emergency security monitoring cell would be opened at its office and the government should station there senior officials of different agencies, including the Rapid Action Battalion and the paramilitary Bangladesh Rifles.

It said the BGMEA leaders will meet the prime minister and the opposition leader again and urge them to make public statements against the recent rampage.

The meeting reverberated with heated words of the garment owners, who blasted the government, the opposition and the media for the unrest.

'We want to declare that the government has failed to ensure security,' Abu Tayeb said.

Harun ur Rashid, owner of a garment factory, demanded imposition of section 144 in and around

every factory to ward off hoodlums.

Former BGMEA president Annisul Huq invited representative of the print and electronic media to visit every factory and find out non-paying owners. 'Garment owners lose workers if they delay payment even for a week.'

AK Azad of the Hamim Group warned politicians that they would fail to run the country if the garment industry collapsed.

He and some speakers regretted the opposition leader's failure to make a statement against anarchy.

'The opposition leader told us that she did not have forces to control the plotters but we believe her statement in favour of the industry would have cooled down the situation,' said Salam Murshedy.

Redwan Ahmed MP said workers did not damaged the factories, criminals did.

Later at a press conference at the BGMEA office, business leaders from different sectors supported the BGMEA proposals. Leaders of different business chambers spoke.

Almost all the garment factories in and around Dhaka, including the units at the export processing zone, kept their production suspended on Wednesday, the factory owners said.

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## **Tripartite meeting to resolve standoff in RMG sector**

*Board formed to fix minimum wage*

Staff Correspondent

The government, readymade garment factory owners and workers on Wednesday came to a consensus that they would amicably resolve the crisis, under which the apparel sector has been reeling since Monday.

At a lengthy tripartite meeting at the secretariat, they formed a 'minimum wage board', headed by a joint secretary of the labour and employment ministry, to deal exclusively with the wages in the RMG industry. The name of other members of the five-member board, comprising two from the owners' side and the rest from the workers' side, would shortly be announced.

Concluding the meeting, the state minister for labour and manpower, Amanullah Aman, who presided over the meeting, said the board would revise the minimum wage for workers, which was last updated in 1994.

'The government would arrange compensation for the affected workers, and take stern action against the anarchists,' Aman told the meeting, which unanimously decided to reopen Thursday the factories that had remained shut for the last three days.

It also decided to withdraw the cases filed against the workers and release those who are genuine garment workers. However, longstanding demand for collective bargaining agents in the garment industries remained unresolved.

The government said the matter would be resolved according to the labour law, but a section of the factory owners expressed their fear over the matter.

In line with the prime minister's directive, the labour and employment ministry called the tripartite meeting to bring to an end the workers' unrest in the RMG sector, which earns 76 per cent of the total foreign exchange.

Thousands of garment workers, deprived for years of their genuine rights and privileges, took to the streets on Monday and Tuesday and vandalised more than 300 factories in Dhaka, Gazipur, and Savar.

The attacks left at least two garment workers killed, for whom an obituary motion was moved at the meeting.

Meeting sources said the owners admitted that a section of them have long been depriving the workers of their rights and wages.

The workers say it was a spontaneous outburst of the years of deprivation and injustices in the

factories.

But they shifted the blame of vandalism to some vested quarters, calling upon the government to identify them as soon as possible.

Their demands included announcement of minimum wages, weekly holidays, maternity leave and establish the workers' right to form trade unions in the garments factories. On behalf of the owners, Annisul Huq, a director of the Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters' Association, accepted the demand and assured the workers of taking the needful measures.

The minister for fisheries and livestock, Abdullah Al Noman, was also present at the meeting. Md Jafrul Hasan, secretary general of the Jatiyatabadi Sramik Dal, Shahjahan Khan MP of the Jatiya Sramik League, Shah Mohammad Abu Jafar, president of the Bangladesh Labour Federation, and Montu Ghosh of the Bangladesh Trade Union spoke at the five-hour-long meeting.

It was alleged in the meeting that the minimum wage of Tk 930, which was fixed in 1994, was yet to be implemented in many factories.

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<http://www.thedailystar.net/2006/05/26/d6052601011.htm>

# The Daily Star

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## **Factories restart with thin presence of workers**

Star Report

Production in garment factories in the city and on its outskirts including Dhaka EPZ resumed yesterday amidst tight security after three days of vandalism and arson by workers agitating to realise their 11-point demand.

The resumption of work followed a tripartite meeting among the government, BGMEA and trade union leaders on Wednesday night.

No untoward incident was reported yesterday and presence of workers was much less than usual.

Many workers had left for their homes in the wake Monday's violence fearing arrest and because some of the torched factories were declared closed for an indefinite period, throwing their employees into a state of uncertainty.

Law enforcement agencies including Rapid Action Battalion (Rab), Armed Police Battalion (APBn), riot police and Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) have been deployed at most of the garment units.

Meanwhile, normalcy returned at the factories both in and outside the EPZ (export processing zone) at Ashulia and Savar. Attendance of workers however varied from factory to factory as many of them have gone home. Workers' attendance was lower in factories outside the EPZ.

Factory authorities hoped all workers would join duty by tomorrow and normal production would start.

While most of the factories outside the EPZ have resumed operation, a small number of those remained closed yesterday for reconstruction or fearing further violence.

The owners of the factories have assured the employees of full payment of wages for this month despite the disruption of production.

"Though our investors are worried about the incidents in the last few days, the situation is normal now. Our workers were not involved in violence," said Kamal Akhtar, general manager of the EPZ.

"We have decided to grant leave for workers who are absent today (Thursday). We have not marked them absent as we know our workers had no links to last three days' violence," said GM Hannan, manager (administration) of A-One (BD) Ltd, which was set on fire on Monday.

About 61,215 workers out of 64,318 yesterday joined duty in 81 factories out of 84 at the EPZ, including its extension. As the workers started turning up at the EPZ main entrance early in the morning, the authorities asked them over microphone to carry identity card or gate pass with them.

Three factories-- Leni Fashion, GB Garment and Crylon -- declared vacation to let the situation turn normal.

The owners visited their factories yesterday and asked the officials to make an estimate of the losses for submission to the authorities concerned and the insurance companies.

Representatives from insurance companies also visited the affected factories.

The badly damaged or burnt factories have started reconstruction.

Large contingents of BDR, Rab and police were guarding all important points and factories on Dhaka-Aricha, Dhaka-Baipail-Chandra and Dhaka-Tongi-Ashulia highways and inside the EPZ.

Commerce Minister Hafizuddin Ahmed, State Minister for Home Lutfozzaman Babar and a BGMEA-team yesterday afternoon visited the affected factories including Bando Design Ltd, Envoy Groups and Universe Knitting Factories.

They also visited the factories inside the EPZ.

"We condemned violence at the factories that has not only affected the owners but also the nation and the country. The incidents were designed to tarnish the good image of our industrial sector that earned 76 per cent of our export income," said Hafizuddin. "Action will be taken against the persons involved in the conspiracy, and my ministry will provide assistance to the affected owners."

Babar said, "It is a conspiracy by our competitors to destroy the garment sector in our country. Suspicious persons were seen at the spots of violence and we are working on it. We will protect our country as well as our industry at any cost."

Prof Abdus Shahid, chief whip of the opposition, also visited Savar yesterday.

"Most of the factories resumed operation peacefully and without any untoward incident," said Abdus Salam Murshedi, acting president of the BGMEA.

Most of the garment factories at Tongi, Konabari, Mouchak, Boardbazar and Salna areas in Gazipur also resumed operation, reports a correspondent in Gazipur.



Meanwhile, a Gazipur court yesterday granted bail to trade union leader Mushfeka Mishu. She was produced before the court as she fell sick during a five-day remand.

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<http://www.wsws.org/articles/2006/may2006/labo-m27.shtml>

## Asia

### Police fire on striking Bangladeshi garment workers

Bangladeshi paramilitary forces and police fired on demonstrating apparel workers on May 22 and 23, killing at least two and injuring hundreds more. One of those killed was 25-year-old Rana from the Savar export-processing zone. Around 31 workers were arrested.

The incident occurred when apparel workers from the Universe Knitting Factory in the Savar zone struck for an 11-point log of claims, which included an immediate pay rise, a guaranteed basic wage instead of piece rates, payment of wage arrears, overtime rates, and an end to employer harassment. The strike spread rapidly drawing in workers from Savar, Dhaka and surrounding areas, such as Shewrapara, Mirpur, Ksfrul, Tejgaon.

Around 7,000 police and army personnel fired live ammunition, baton charged and used tear gas against the workers who had erected roadblocks. In the ongoing clashes around 500 vehicles and 300 factories were damaged.

On May 23 defiant strikers rallied at Ashulia in Savar demanding jailed workers be released and charges dropped against six of their colleagues, including Mosharefa Mishu, a Garments Workers Front official. Most garment factories in Dhaka and surrounding areas remained closed for a third consecutive day on May 24.

Around 10,000 armed forces, including 30 platoons of Bangladesh Rifles, 800 Rapid Action Battalion members, riot police and additional police have been deployed in Dhaka.

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<http://www.newagebd.com/2006/jun/01/front.html#e>

### DEPZ flares up again

Staff Correspondent

At least 30 people were injured on Wednesday in clashes between workers and officials of a readymade garment factory in the Dhaka export processing zone at Savar.

In the morning several hundred workers of A-1 garments factory started a work abstention programme to press home their 11-point charter of demands.

More than 100 workers from Youngone, Spot-ex and Shine Fashion, a sister concern of Ring Sign Industry, expressed solidarity with the demands and also went on work abstention.

The workers also staged demonstrations.

‘We staged a sit-in and refused to work, as the authorities refuse to fulfil our demands about salary, working hours, overtime allowance and other benefits,’ said an agitated worker.

‘The workers tried to reason with the management but it did not pay any attention,’ Sabina, another worker who was injured in the clashes, said.

Meanwhile, Shine Fashion announced that they would meet the workers’ demand after a meeting between the representatives of the workers and the management.

As the news broke, the A-1 workers staged demonstration, asking the authorities to immediately meet their demands. Otherwise, they said, they would not join work.

At about 11:30am, the general manager, the production manager and some sidekicks of the owner assaulted some workers, triggering off violence.

The workers assaulted the general manager, Mohammad Hannan, and the production manager, Mohammad Jewel.

A journalist of the electronic media was also assaulted before being rescued by members of the police, the Bangladesh Ansars and the Rapid Action Battalion.

‘We tried to convince the foreign authorities [of the factory] into meeting our demands but a section of local officials misled them,’ a representative of the workers alleged.

All the workers of Youngone, Spot-tex and A-1 factory located at Old DEPZ pledged to continue their demonstrations until their demands were met.

In a joint statement, Jatiya Sramik Federation president Sahida Sarkar and general secretary Amirul Haque urged the authorities to accept the demands of the workers immediately.

A tense situation is prevailing in the area despite deployment of a huge contingent of the police, the Bangladesh Rifles, the Ansars and the Rapid Action Battalion.

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## **Workers press home five-point demand**

Staff Correspondent

Garments Sramik O Shilpa Rakkha Jatiya Mancha, a combine of garments workers’ organisations, on Wednesday called upon the government to fulfil its five-point demands within June 10.

Otherwise, the combine will observe countrywide daylong strike in the garments industries on June 12.

The demands include fixing minimum wage for garment workers at Tk 3000, giving trade union rights, weekly holiday and appointment letters for the workers.

Leaders of the garments workers at a press conference at the Asad Auditorium in the capital said they made the decision of holding the strike at national convention of the combine in February.

The combine will hold mass contacts from June 3 to June 10 to make the strike a success, the combine coordinator, Quamrul Ahsan, said at the press conference.

It will also hold a red flag rally of workers at Muktangan on June 4.

Abul Hossain, Sarder Khorshed, Mahbubur Rahman Ismail, Lavly Yesmin were, among others, present at the press conference.

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[http://www.financialexpress-bd.com/index3.asp?cnd=6/2/2006&section\\_id=1&newsid=26481&spcl=no](http://www.financialexpress-bd.com/index3.asp?cnd=6/2/2006&section_id=1&newsid=26481&spcl=no)

*Minimum wages board for RMG holds first meeting*

## **Fresh trouble erupts at DEPZ, forces closure of 87 factories**

FE Report

6/2/2006

Garment workers staged a violent demonstration in the Dhaka Export Processing Zone (DEPZ) Thursday and a section of workers attacked and beat a number of officials of some apparel units forcing the closure of seven factories.

The seven factories that remained closed Thursday are: Ringsign, Shine Fashion, Honour Way Textile and apparels Ltd and Swan Loan, Youngone, Soft-Tex and A-1.

Meanwhile, the government has appointed two members for the Minimum Wages Board for the readymade garments (RMG) sector.

The members are: former president of the Bangladesh Garments Manufacturers and Exporters

Association (BGMEA) Annisul Huq on behalf of the owners and President of Shammilito Garments Workers Federation Nazma Akhter from the workers side, according to a gazette notification issued Wednesday.

The board, headed by former Justice Anwarul Huq, sat in its first meeting Thursday where the two members sought seven days for doing their homework.

The board will fix minimum wages for apparel workers.

Police sources said several hundred workers of three factories at Konabari, Ziranibazar and Gazipur Sadar Municipal area demonstrated and went on a rampage in support of their eight-point demand, including, among others, the increase of wages.

The workers of Anupam Knit Factory broke the windowpanes of the factory.

The Superintendent of Police (SP) of Gazipur Md Mafizuddin, along with a large contingent of riot police, rushed to the spot and held a meeting with the workers and the General Manager (GM) of Anupam Knit Factory.

The worker of the Titas Garments stopped production of the factory after 12 noon, demanding Tk 400 as attendance bonus.

The BGMEA and the Bangladesh Export Processing Zones Authority (BEPZA) Thursday blamed some vested international quarters for the continuous labour unrest in the apparel sector in Dhaka and its outskirts.

During a meeting with Commerce Minister Hafiz Uddin Ahmed Thursday, the BGMEA leaders alleged that an unholy axis was patronising their local agents to create a fresh unrest, despite the fact that the RMG unit owners agreed in principle to fulfill the demands of the workers through a tripartite meeting held at the Ministry of Labour and Employment on May 24 last.

"We have agreed to fulfill the demands but a section of workers is trying to create a fresh unrest. A wage board to review the current wage structure has also been formed as per the demand of the workers," President of the BGMEA Tipu Munshi told newsmen after a meeting with Commerce Minister Hafiz Uddin Ahmed Thursday.

Executive Chairman of Bangladesh Export Processing Zones Authority (BEPZA) Zakir Hossain alleged that some international conspirators were involved in the recent labour unrest with a view to destroying the industry.

Emerging from the meeting, Commerce Minister Hafiz Uddin Ahmed said that the ministry was monitoring the developments in the RMG sector and would take necessary steps to stop the unrest.

Garments are Bangladesh's largest export, fetching more than \$6.0 billion a year for the country.

The industry has over 4,000 factories and employs nearly two million workers.

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<http://www.newagebd.com/2006/jun/02/front.html#15>

## **Labour unrest continues**

*Workers of 16 factories abstain from work, 50 injured in fresh clashes*

Staff Correspondent

Agitated garment workers of Dhaka Export Processing Zone partially damaged a factory and injured 15 officials loyal to the factory owners during their agitation for the second consecutive day on Thursday.

Hundreds of workers from different factories housed at the old and new export processing zones started their work abstention demanding realisation of their 11-points charter that includes a pay hike, weekly holiday, payment of arrears and other facilities.

Witness and police said, workers of Lani Fashion began work abstention and demonstrated inside the factory pressing for their demands at around 8:00am.

The workers first pressed their foreign owners to meet their demands during work stoppage. But as the owners did not respond, angry workers pelted brickbats at the factory and damaged



windowpanes.

As factory officials, believed to be loyal to the owners retaliated, a chase and counter-chase between the two sides ensued leaving over 20 persons injured.

The workers assaulted Shahabuddin Ahmed, administrative officer, Mahbubul Haque, personnel manager and Biman Kanti Sarkar, welfare secretary.

A large contingent of police and Rapid Action Battalion went to the spot and indiscriminately charged batons that left at least 35 workers injured.

But the angry workers attacked the fourth floor of the factory and damaged 20 rooms, including machinery, computers and equipment.

Soon after the incident, Bangladesh Export Processing Zone Authority went to the spot and assured the workers that their demands in phases after discussions with the owners.

Later, the authority declared a general holiday on Thursday and the workers left the spot.

Hearing the news, hundreds of workers of the Fahmee Fashion at Baipail on Ashulia-Tongi Highway started work abstention and demonstrated demanding their 11-point charter.

They went on a rampage and assaulted 10 officials of the factory as they tried to resist.

A large police contingent and the Rapid Action Battalion went to the spot and brought the situation under control.

A meeting between worker's representatives and the factory authority was underway at 8:30pm.

Inside the export processing zone, the factory authorities along with the law enforcers and BEPZA general manager Kamal Akhtar sat in a conciliatory meeting to resolve the crisis.

Hearing the news, at least 16 factories initiated work stoppage including, Ring Sign, Shine Fashion, Honour Way Textile and Apparels, Swan Loan, Youngone, Soft-Tex and A-1, Red Point, Sheba Garments, Grameen Knitwear, Dhaka Beijing Garments, Dhaka-Ria Fashion, Zong Shine Fashion, YKK Industry and Asia Plastic on Thursday.

Later, the authorities declared a general holiday on Thursday and the angry workers left their factories.

Meanwhile, workers of Anupam Sweater factory and Titas Knitting Factory in

Gazipur started work abstention and demonstrated in front of the factories demanding their 11-point charter.

During the agitation, some workers also damaged some machinery and windowpanes of Anupam Sweater Factory.

Hearing the news, contingents of police and Rapid Action Battalion went to the spot and brought the situation under control.

The workers left the spot after the deputy commissioner and the police superintendent assured them of meeting their demands immediately.

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## **Body formed to review RMG wages**

Kazi Azizul Islam

The government on Thursday formed a tripartite commission to review and recommend minimum wages of the garment sector workers, while ministers met leaders of garment owners and workers on the same day to evaluate the continuing unrest among garment workers.

Presided over by the labour minister, Aman Ullah Aman, the meeting was attended by commerce minister Hafizuddin Ahmed, leaders of the garment owners, leaders of the Sramik Karmachari Oikya Parishad — the umbrella of the national workers' bodies, expressed concerns on continued tension at the factories, including clashes between workers and factory administration at garment units at the export processing zones.

Sources at the meeting said garment owners pledged that they would provide appointment letters to all workers, ensure legitimate facilities including eight-hour workday, proper payment of overtime and maternity leaves.

‘Owners’ representatives have agreed to implement workers facilities and benefits,’ said Shafiuddin Ahmed a leader of the parishad.

He said parishad leaders, labour minister and garment owners will visit garment units on June 4 and will sit again on June 12 to discuss the industry’s situation and implementation of workers’ facilities.

The meeting urged workers to maintain congenial environment for saving the county’s largest industrial sector that employs more than two million people and earns three-fourth the country’s export.

‘We told the meeting that a vested quarter was instigating the workers’ unrest and clashes,’ said BGMEA vice-president Shahadat Hossain Chowdhury. ‘The meeting advised owners to ensure all benefits of workers.’

Meeting sources said, the leaders of the Bangladesh Garments Manufacturers and Exporters Association at the meeting said one representative of the sector in the wage commission is inadequate as the commission will need to work out wages in a vast sector that comprises a number of sub-sectors.

The labour minister assured them that although existing laws permit one representative each from workers and owners at the commission it will try to make provision for three or four advisers to the commission on behalf of the owners as well as the workers.

Earlier in the day, the government formed a six-member minimum garment wage review commission headed by chairman of the Minimum Wage Board, Anwarul Haque.

It included Annisul Huq, a former president of the garment association as a representative of owners and Nazma Akter, president of the Sammilita Garments Shramik Federation as workers’ representative.

The commission, at its first meeting, discussed their agenda and proceedings and agreed to meet again next week.

Private sector wage commissions comprises of four permanent members including the chairman of the Minimum Wage Board under the labour ministry, and three permanent members.

They are Iqbal Ahmed, a teacher of business law at the Institute of Business Administration, Dhaka University, Jafrul Hasan, secretary general of the Jatiyabadi Sramik Dal, the and Kazi Saifuddin Ahmed adviser of the Bangladesh Employers Federation.

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<http://www.thedailystar.net/2006/06/04/d6060401022.htm>

## **Workers damage RMG units, fight with law enforcers: 100 hurt**

Star Report

The Daily Star, Bangladesh - Jun 3, 2006

Garment workers yesterday continued vandalism and protests in Gazipur, Savar and Ashulia in a bid to realise their 11-point demand. They engaged in pitched battles with the law enforcers leaving around 100 people injured at Dhaka Export Processing Zone (DEPZ).

Production in many factories at DEPZ was once again suspended after agitating workers were locked in triangular clashes between two groups of labourers and the law enforcers. The disruption forced foreign and local investors to close their factories even in the adjacent areas of DEPZ as well.

Many factory owners at Zamgora, Zirani, Bypile, adjacent areas of DEPZ, closed their factories fearing agitators might instigate their employees into vandalism. Many garment factory owners in Gazipur also shut down their factories following agitations and workers' strike.

The workers set up barricades on roads of Ashulia, Kaliakoir and Gazipur creating huge gridlocks that lasted for more than four hours.

Around 3,000 workers demonstrated inside the DEPZ since yesterday morning and brought out processions asking their colleagues to join in.

The agitators ransacked many water jars left in front of a factory and violently struck the gates of several factories trying to break in. They chanted slogans in support of their 11-point demand. The clashes ensued after Commerce Minister Hafizuddin Ahmed, State Minister for Labour and Employment Amanullah Aman yesterday morning visited factories damaged in previous attacks. Awami League (AL) lawmaker Shajahan Khan, presidents and leaders of BGMEA and BKMEA, SCOP, several business leaders and Bangladesh Export Processing Zones Authority (Bepza) officials accompanied the ministers.

Thousands of workers surrounded the visiting ministers when they entered the premises of a factory and asked them to resolve their issues immediately. Later, the delegation held a rally with the workers where labour leaders spoke for their demands.

Their demands included a minimum wage of Tk 3,000 while Tk 13,000 for skilled workers, a weekly holiday, not to engage the female workers on night shifts, transport facilities, punishment to corrupt Bepza officials, the right to form workers' unions, appointment letters for the workers and implementation of the Factory Act.

Amanullah Aman admitted that there were a few irregularities and assured the workers that he would solve their problems soon. He also called for a tripartite meeting between the government, factory owners and three workers' representatives from each of the factories.

As the workers demanded to resolve their issues on the spot, the Commerce Minister Hafiz Uddin said the problem could not be solved overnight. He also told the workers Bepza would open a Complaint Box for the workers to lodge their complaints there.

When the ministers stepped down from the stage, workers, allegedly of Youngone Hi-tech Sportswear Industries and Beximco Fashion Ltd with coloured headbands, attacked the workers of the rally with sticks prompting chases and counter chases that left more than 30 people injured. Police tried to bring the situation under control but the agitating workers alleged the law enforcers joined the attacking group of workers who belonged to pro-owners' group. Thirteen critically injured workers were admitted to local clinics for treatment.

Meanwhile, four more workers of Shanta Washworks were also injured when Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) men allegedly charged truncheons on them to vacate the factory after the workers went on a strike.

Transport movement on Nabinagar-Kaliakoir highway was disrupted for four hours as hundreds of workers took to the street setting up barricades around 10:00am.

A huge contingent of police, Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) men and Rab personnel were deployed in the trouble-torn areas.

## **GAZIPUR**

Production at seven garment factories in Gazipur came to a standstill yesterday as demonstrating workers went on a rampage and clashed with riot police, a correspondent in Gazipur reports.

The workers' demonstrations at the seven factories in Jirani Bazar, Konabari, Mouchak, Baraypar and Tongi also disrupted vehicular movement on Kaliakoir-Nabinagar and Kaliakoir-Joydevpur highways for about two hours.

Witnesses said at around 11:00am more than 2,000 workers of Dorin Garments at Jirani Bazar stopped working and came out of their garments chanting slogans in support of their 11-point demand.

The demonstrating workers went on the rampage ransacking windowpanes, doors and furniture of the factory. Riot police rushed to the spot and their attempt to calm things down led to chases and counter chases that left around 25 workers injured.

As the clashes spread to the Kaliakoir-Nabinagar highway, traffic movement was snapped. Police lobbed three canisters of teargas to disperse the angry workers who threw brickbats in return. The workers however left the place around 1:25pm.

Workers unrest also began at the factories of Mandal Group on Konabari-Kashimpur road around 10:00pm as owners of the factory allegedly failed to sit with the workers in a scheduled negotiation meeting.

The workers left the factory peacefully after the owner assured the workers of holding the meeting today. The workers however did not resume work.

Following workers' demonstration at Mandal Group, the owner of nearby Delta Composite suspended production fearing violence in his factory.

Witnesses said the violence at Dorin Garments was about to spread to nearby Orient Garments as workers on strike started chanting slogans in support of their six-point demand. However, Orient Garments owner's assurance of meeting all their demands appeased the workers who however did not resume work.

Workers of Hay Chong Corporation at Baraypara of Kaliakoir and Nippon Garments at Tongi went on a strike around 12:30pm yesterday. The striking workers at Hay Chong Corporation alleged their officials torture them on trivial matters. They also demanded compensation for the family of a fellow worker who was killed a few days ago following a machine explosion.

Police sources said around 800 policemen from different districts were brought into Gazipur yesterday to contain the workers' agitation.

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<http://www.newagebd.com/2006/jun/04/front.html#1>

## **Garment units at DEPZ shut as violence escalates**

*100 injured in clashes, ministers booed*

Arif Newaz Farazi and Kazi Azizul Islam

Owners of garment factories located at the Dhaka Export Processing Zone declared suspension of work at the apparel manufacturing units in and around the zone amid escalating labour unrest which left at least 100 people injured on Saturday.



The crisis came to a head as workers continued violent demonstrations at the export processing zone and clusters of garment factories in the adjoining areas against low pay and lack of other facilities.

On Saturday the angry workers clashed with police and agents of factory owners and surrounded motorcades of the labour minister, Aman Ullah Aman, and the commerce minister, Hafiz Uddin Ahmed demanding on-the-spot implementation of their 11-point demand.

According to witnesses, hundreds of workers of Lenny Fashion and Honourway Industry began work abstention at 8:00am and staged demonstrations inside the factories to push their 11-point demands including pay hike, weekly holiday, payment of arrears and other facilities.

The workers shouted slogans and warned the owners and the mediators of dire consequences if they failed to meet their demands immediately.

The arrival of the two ministers triggered off violent protests inside the Dhaka Export Processing Zone.

As the ministers, along with one opposition lawmaker, the local MPs, the chairman of the BEPZA and leaders of the BGMEA, entered the export processing zone at about 9:30am, hundreds of workers surrounded them and pressed for accepting their demands instantly.

The agitated workers hurled abuse at the ministers and chanted slogans against them and the BEPZA chairman.

But the ministers and the BAPZA authorities assured them of meeting their demands after a tripartite meeting of the representatives of workers, owners and the government on Sunday.

In a few minutes hundreds of workers from nearby factories joined the demonstrators and turned violent.

In the face of protests the ministers left the place amid tight security after a few minutes of talks with officials in front of the main entrance of the DEPZ.

The angry workers called on all workers of the zone to join them in work abstention, but workers

of some of the factories, which already accepted their demands, including the Beximco and Youngone, attacked the striking workers with sticks and iron rods.

Soon the entire zone turned into a battle field. The angry workers damaged windowpanes of some factories hurling stones.

The police reinforcements and the Rapid Action Battalion arrived at the spot and swung into action that left at least 100 workers injured, 30 of them critically.

Soon after the clashes, officials of the Bangladesh Export Processing Zone Authority went to the spot and assured the workers that their demands would be met in phases after a discussion with the owners on Sunday.

Later, the factory owners decided to close all the factories at the Dhaka Export Processing Zone and the workers dispersed.

‘Most of the factories have stopped their operations,’ admitted Kamal Akhter, the general manager of the BEPZA adding that they called a tripartite meeting of the representatives of workers, owners and the governments on Sunday to resolve the crisis.

The general manager claimed that a few factories, which had already accepted their workers’ demands, were continuing production at the zone.

The Dhaka Export Processing Zone, is an exclusive industrial belt established in 1993, where 84 foreign and local factories are located, and 64,318 male and female workers are working.

Meanwhile, the Bangladesh Export Processing Zones Investors Association (BEPZIA) in a meeting in the city on Saturday decided to stop production at their factories until the situation became normal.

‘We have decided to stop productions for security reasons as most of the owners fear further disturbances,’ said S A Noor, vice-chairman of Youngone Bangladesh.

Fazlul Haque, president of the Bangladesh Knitwear Manufacturers and Exporters Association, told New Age: ‘dozens of knitwear units located in Ashulia, Savar and Gazipur were forced to close due to workers’ unrest.’

Our Gazipur correspondent said hundreds of workers of different factories at Zirabo and Konabari started work abstention and staged demonstrations to push their demands.

The workers also damaged the factories of Oriental Garments and He Chung Fashion during demonstrations.

The police and the Rapid Action Battalion rushed to the spots and charged batons indiscriminately leaving at least 30 workers injured.

The workers blocked traffic on Ashulia-Chandra road for an hour.

Later, owners most of the factories decided to stop production.

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<http://www.newagebd.com/2006/jun/04/front.html#1>

## **Owners urged to accept workers’ demands**

Obaidul Ghani

The Bangladesh National Council of Textile, Garment and Leather Workers Federation on Saturday urged the government and garments owners to immediately accept the legitimate demands of the garments workers.

Leaders of the federation, a combine of 23 labourer associations, at a National Press Club news briefing also asked the garment owners to stop ‘repression’ on the workers.

Reading out the keynote paper, the federation general secretary, Roy Romesh Chandra, said the authorities should accept the demands of the garment workers including trade unionism, appointment cards to the workers, fix the minimum wage at Tk 3,000, eight working hours a day and safe working place.

‘There is no scope to avoid the genuine demands of the workers in the name of foreign conspiracy or conspiracy to attack the political rivals,’ Romesh said referring to the comments of some ruling



party and BGMEA leaders regarding the recent agitation of the workers.

The garment sector workers work an average of 12 to 14 hours a day and do not enjoy any weekly holiday, said the federation leaders adding that they (workers) were even deprived of their right to trade unionism.

They said the minimum wage fixed in 1994 at Tk 930 remained same although the living cost had gone up by three times in the past 12 years.

Referring to the nomination of a workers representative in the newly formed national wage commission, they said he (the representative) did not represent the workers as 'the government and BGMEA selected him according to their choice'.

The briefing was attended, among others, by Abul Bashar, Mamunur Rashid Chowdhury, Badrudozza Mizan, Kamrul Anam, Shamima Nasrin and Dilruba Anguri.

Meanwhile, a forum of sixteen organisations of garment workers on Saturday gave a three-day ultimatum to implement the decisions of the May 24 tripartite meeting and threatened with tougher programmes, otherwise.

The forum at a meeting also demanded inclusion of a workers representative in the newly-formed wage commission in place of the incumbent one 'selected by the government and the BGMEA'.

The forum leaders also expressed solidarity with the agitating workers of the Dhaka Export Processing Zone, Ashulia and Gazipur.

Chaired by Touhidur Rahman, the meeting was addressed, among others, by Delwar Hossain Khan, Amirul Haque Amin, Sirajul Islam Roni, Selim Reza and Shahidul Islam.

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<http://www.newagebd.com/2006/jun/05/front.html#1>

## **EPZ unrest goes on in heavy presence of law enforcers**

*Security forces kept on high alert in and around Dhaka EPZ*

Staff Correspondent

Garment worker continued agitation in the industrial belt along Savar, Ashulia, Tongi and Gazipur on Sunday to push for their 11-point demands amid heavy presence of law enforcers.

Around 5,000 personnel of the Rapid Action Battalion, Bangladesh Rifles, police and the Armed Police Battalion were deployed in and around the Dhaka Export Processing Zone early Saturday to avert further untoward incidents.

No one was allowed entry to the old and new zones where yellow ribbons were put around the entrances. Hundreds of workers, who went there to join work, were forced to leave the place.

A near-curfew situation prevailed everywhere as the security forces were kept on high alert in and around the export processing zone.

Workers, however, went out on demonstrations in some places.

The commerce minister, Hafiz Uddin Ahmed, appealed to the investors to reopen the factories, but the owners kept sticking to their demands for security. Investors on Saturday shut the factories for an indefinite period amid the ongoing labour unrest with vandalism.

The investors will hold a meeting today to review the overall situation and decide on reopening the factories.

Most factories outside the export processing zone resumed operation in the morning, but they were all closed before noon fearing attack and vandalism. Some, however, continued operation.

There had been chases between two groups of workers and between the workers and law enforcers at Jamgora and Baipail in which 10 were wounded.

Raju, 20, worker of the Masihata Sweater Factory, died after jumping off the second floor of the



factory at about 9:30am amid rumour of attack by agitating workers.

Hundreds of workers crowded the export processing zone areas and in front of other factories. They were not allowed to team up.

‘We came to join work after hearing the announcement of indefinite closure of factories on PA system at around 7:30am,’ Halim, a line chief at the Youngone Group, told New Age.

A tripartite meeting of the government, investors and the workers’ representatives was scheduled at 3:00pm Saturday, but the investors refused to join the meeting.

Lawmen were seen posted to numerous points in the trouble-torn areas and at each of the garment factories.

The authorities of the Sony Sweater Limited at Jamgora announced a general holiday when workers went out on demonstrations chanting slogans inside the factory. Workers sent out and barricaded the Ashulia-Tongi Road, causing severe traffic congestion for two hours.

They tried to storm into the THAT’s Sportswear of the Hamim Group at Jamgora at around 11:15am, but the workers of the factory resisted them. Failing to get inside, they smashed some windowpanes by pelting stones and left the place when law enforcers standing near by approached.

‘Outsiders unleashed the attack when production at the factory was going on in full swing,’ Ruhul Amin, a garment supervisor, told New Age.

Vehicle movement on the Nabinagar-Kaliakair Highway was disrupted for about four hours as the law enforcers barred traffic at 7:00am from going through the road fearing attack by the workers.

The workers resisted their fellows when they were on their way to work at Tongi, Konabari and at Kaliakair.

Hundreds of workers attacked the Suchi and Anupam Sweater, smashed windowpanes and drove out the workers from the factories.

The police charged at the workers with batons as they tried to vandalise the Hai Chung Industry. A series of chases took place between them, forcing many factories to pull down their shutters.

The general manager of the Bangladesh Export Processing Zone Authority, Kamal Akhter and security official KM Ahsanullah were suspended Saturday night for their failure to control the situation at Savar.

An inquiry committee, headed by the local government secretary, ASM Zahirul Islam, was formed to investigate the whole incident of unrest and vandalism.

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<http://www.newagebd.com/2006/jun/05/front.html#1>

## **Foreign, local plot behind unrest: Hafiz**

Staff Correspondent

The commerce minister, Hafizuddin Ahmed, said on Sunday that ‘foreign and local conspirators’ had orchestrated troubles in the readymade garment sector, and accused the opposition of fanning the flames and the media of carrying biased and misleading reports on the workers unrest which he dubbed as ‘terrorist activities.’

‘We hope that the situation will turn congenial within a week if any new conspiracy is not hatched,’ Hafiz said at a meeting with the DEPZ entrepreneurs, arranged by the Bangladesh Export Processing Zone Authority at its headquarters in the city.

The executive chairman of the BEPZA, Zakir Hossain, the DEPZ investors, Peter Bauer, Kaiser Rahman and Anisul Islam Mahmud, spoke at the meeting. The chairman of Bangladesh EPZ Investors’ Association, Kihak Sung, now in Soul, interacted with the meeting through video conferencing system.

The commerce minister assured the investors of all possible actions from the government and claimed that the situation was improving. ‘Go and see, the situation has improved remarkably there (DEPZ).’

He termed Saturday's incidents as 'unfortunate' and said 'sorry' to the DEPZ investors, but did not make any instant request to the entrepreneurs to reopen their factories.

The minister said 'foreign conspirators with the help of their local collaborators' designed the heinous incidents, but in the same breath contradicted his own claim by saying: 'We are not yet clear who orchestrated the incidents.'

'I request the opposition not to fuel the workers' unrest,' Hafiz said and urged the media to report the happenings 'in right perspective.'

He told investors that the government had formed a committee headed by a joint secretary to probe Saturday's violence at the DEPZ and would take long-term actions to prevent such incidents following the committee's report.

The minister, however, requested investors to consider the workers' demands and address their grievances.

The DEPZ Investors, who shut down their units on Saturday for an indefinite period following the fresh violence, said they would not reopen the factories until the BEPZA authorities guaranteed total security.

Kihak Sung said: 'we are confused over the DEPZ incidents whether those were forced by insiders or outsiders, but we saw the BEPZA authorities badly managing the situation.'

Insecurity forced the investors to close down factories, reiterated Sung, who observed that 'some of the grievances of the workers might be genuine, but they were mostly instigated and dictated by outsiders.'

Kaiser Rahman said the law and order at the DEPZ deteriorated due to external interference.

Anisul Islam Mahmud said, 'trouble-mongers' were inspired by the outsiders. 'The industry will face contractions following this.'

Some of the DEPZ investors preferred taking some two weeks to reopen their factories.

The BEPZA Chairman said a committee had been formed with a general manager to find out failures of the BEPZA officials, if any, to tackle the situation.

Three DEPZ officials were sacked on Saturday while some others were facing actions, according to the BEPZA officials.

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<http://www.newagebd.com/2006/jun/06/front.html#1>

## **DEPZ remains closed as sporadic clashes continue**

*Protesters clubbed at Ashulia, 40 injured*

Staff Correspondent

The Dhaka export processing zone remained closed for the third consecutive day on Monday, while workers continued work abstention and engaged in clashes with law enforcers.

The law enforcers has put the exclusive zone on 'red alert' since the investors decided on Saturday to keep their factories closed until an improvement in law and order. However, some workers at Ashulia, Konabari, Kaliakair, Tongi and Gazipur continued their protest.

Members of the police, the paramilitary Bangladesh Rifles and the Rapid Action Battalion sealed off the Baipail-Chandra road from 6:00am to 10:00am to keep the protestors at bay.

Most of the shops and offices on either side of the road and in the areas adjoining the DEPZ remained closed till midday in anticipation of violence.

Several hundred workers of Simrail Fashion at Baipail on the Baipail-Chandra road started work abstention and staged demonstration in the morning to press for their 11 demands.

As the factory management called for the law enforcers, the protestors went on the rampage,



smashing some windowpanes with stones and brickbats.

The Rapid Action Battalion intervened shortly and charged batons on the protesters, leaving 40 people, included five women, injured.

The battalion also arrested two workers, Emon and Mujahid, with the help of the factory management and handed them over to the Ashulia police station.

As the news of the arrest broke, the workers started demonstrating against the authorities and for the immediate release of their fellow workers.

The demonstrators calmed down after Emon and Mujahid were released and the factory management assured them of fulfilling their demands.

Most of the factories in the areas adjoining the DEPZ, except the ones damaged or ransacked during the recent labour unrest, resumed operation on Monday without any disturbance.

The management of the Masihata Sweater factory handed over Tk 1.50 lakh in compensation to the father of Raju Ahmed, who was killed on Sunday after jumping from the second floor in fear of coming under attack.

The management also promised that it would pay Tk 1 lakh more within the next month.

Hundreds of workers from ARN Sweater factory, Tasnia Fabrics Limited and Multi Cabs Limited, meanwhile, started work abstention to press home the 11 demands since morning.

As the managements of the factories informed the law enforcers, chase and counter-chase between workers and security forces took place.

Later, there was a meeting between the representatives from the managements and the workers of the factories in presence of high RAB officials of the battalion, where it was agreed the workers' demands would be met before the end of this month.

Nine factories of Mandal Group resumed operation on Monday after a meeting between the representatives of the workers and the management.

Agitated garments workers started demonstration to press home their demands on May 22.

The workers demand that minimum wage should be fixed at Tk 3,000 and that skilled workers be paid Tk 13,000 a month.

They have also been rallying for weekly holiday, transport facilities, punishment for corrupt officials of the Bangladesh Export Processing Zone Authority, rights to form workers' union and implementation of the factory act.

They also want the management to issue appointment letters for each and every worker and not to engage female workers in night shift.

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## **Garment factory attacked in Ctg**

Staff Correspondent . Chittagong

The labour unrest raging through the clusters of garment factories in and around Dhaka, is showing signs of spreading to the port city of Chittagong where workers, demanding back pay, attacked a factory on Sunday night.

The police and local sources said nearly one hundred workers of Saima Apparels at Baluchara in Baizid area of Chittagong staged demonstration in front of the factory on Sunday evening when production at the factory was on.

The angry workers threw stones at the factory building smashing its doors and windowpanes. The police rushed to the spot and brought the situation under control after half an hour, sources said.

The owner of the factory, Sharif Chowdhury, blamed outsiders for the attack on his factory and denied that workers' salaries remained outstanding.

He told New Age that a few workers of the factory had left their jobs without any prior notice last month and they had been asked to receive their salaries on Sunday evening.

'The workers had to wait for a while to receive their salaries, as the people at the accounts section were busy with another work,' he said. But the workers attacked the factory with the help of a gang

of outsiders on the pretext of delay in payment.

Meanwhile, the government has deployed a taskforce, comprising 1,000 police, 200 members of the Rapid Action Battalion (RAB) and six platoons of the paramilitary Bangladesh Rifles with intelligence agencies keeping a constant watch on 601 garment factories in different parts of the city to avert possible troubles.

The first vice-president of the BGMEA, Abu Tayaab, told New Age that most of the garment factories in the city had a good understanding with their workers. He, however, added that a vested quarter was trying to provoke workers into violence to serve their own interest.

'Sunday's attack, the first on a garment factory in the city, was launched by a section of outsiders,' he said adding that it had raised fears of Dhaka-like chaos in the factories in the port city.

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<http://www.newagebd.com/2006/jun/07/front.html#5>

## **Govt to raise industrial police force**

Abul Kalam Azad

The government has undertaken an initiative to create a separate police wing called the Industrial Police Force to maintain peace and order in the country's industrial belts.

The police department sources say the force would be stationed in the industrial belts in Dhaka, its suburbs, Ashulia, Tongi, Gazipur, Narayanganj and Chittagong.

The recent workers' violence which spread like bonfires through clusters of garment factories at Ashulia, Tongi, Gaipur and the Dhaka Export Processing Zone, prompted the authorities to raise a separate force for industrial belts.

A deputy inspector general of police will lead the 3,953-strong force while three additional deputy inspectors general and nine superintendents of police will assist him in maintaining order in the industrial zones.

'Their first and foremost duty will be ensuring peaceful environment in all industries and factories across the country for uninterrupted production,' a senior police official told New Age on Tuesday.

He said recruitment for the force would start after creating new posts.

The decision to form the Industrial Police Force was taken at the last inter-ministerial committee meeting on law and order held at the home ministry on May 22, the day industrial riots flared up at Ashulia.

Understanding the urgency of the problem, the meeting, chaired by the local government, rural development and cooperatives minister, Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan, decided to raise a new police unit for the industrial belts.

The home ministry officials said the authorities had faced difficulties in tackling violence in the industrial zones in the past due to lack of adequate forces.

'Once the force is formed, they will be deployed there to maintain order,' said an official.

He said the government was very serious about raising the new force so that the country's garment sector, which was the highest foreign exchange earner, faced no further disruption of production in future.

Sources said the force would also be responsible for ensuring law and order in industrial belts. If any problem arises, they will act quickly, talk to both owners and workers and solve it.

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<http://www.newagebd.com/2006/jun/07/front.html#5>

## **Most factories around EPZ resume work**

Staff Correspondent

Most factories around the Dhaka Export Processing Zone at Savar resumed operation on Tuesday, but workers at some factories continued work abstention and clashed with law enforcers to push for their 11-point demands.

The law enforcers at the Dhaka Export Processing Zone are on 'red alert' from Saturday, but they did not set up any check-post.

Some workers roamed about near the main gates of the export processing zone hoping to draw their salaries in the morning. Some workers at Ashulia, Jamgora and Gazipur continued agitation.

Several hundred workers of Oshin Garments in front of the Fantasy Kingdom went to join work in the morning only to find the factories closed for an indefinite period.

'The authority requested us to complete the shipment and we worked till 3:00am Tuesday. They assured us we would be paid, but they closed the factory,' alleged Asma, a machine operator.

The workers went on the rampage and damaged some offices by pelting stones. The police and the Rapid Action Battalion charged at them with batons in which 20, including three women, were injured.

The demonstrators calmed down after the authority had assured they would resume work on Wednesday morning fulfilling their demands.

Hundreds of workers of Sonia Sweater Factory, Shade Fashion, P&O Apparels, Shade International, and Rine Fashion, meanwhile, went out on demonstrations in front of their factories.

The police and the battalion personnel stopped them from doing any damage.

The authorities later in the presence of high battalion officials held a meeting with the workers' representatives and the management.

The workers left the place after the authorities had assured them to fulfil their demands by this month.

The authorities of the Hot Dress Limited claimed some workers had attacked their production manager and injured him until the police came to his rescue.

The New Age correspondent in Gazipur said most factories in Gazipur resumed operation on Tuesday morning.

Korean Hey Chung Corporation at Kaliakoir resumed production in the morning, two days after the authorities had closed the factory for an indefinite period.

At about 11:00am, the management and the workers' representatives sat in a meeting to resolve the issues.

As the news sprayed that the management did not agree to meet their demands, the workers went on the rampage. The police and the battalion tackled the situation.

The workers later joined work at around 2:30pm after the management had assured them to meet their demands.

Radiant Garments, RK Garments, Tasnia Fabrics Limited, Multi Fabs Limited and ARN Sweater factory resumed production in the morning after the management had met their demands.

Garment workers began agitation on May 22.

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<http://www.newagebd.com/2006/jun/08/front.html#2>

## **Garment workers attacked at Uttara DEPZ set to reopen today**

Staff Correspondent

At least 20 workers were injured in an attack by a band of armed men, allegedly loyal to the management of a factory, at Uttara on Wednesday, a day before the factories in the Dhaka export processing zone are scheduled to resume operation after almost a week's break.

Investors decided to reopen their factories after a meeting with the new chairman of the Bangladesh Export Processing Zones Authority on Tuesday.

According to the injured workers, criminals hired by the management of Hu Chung Corporation, a Korean company, attacked them when they came to the factory in the morning.

Twelve of the injured workers were admitted to Dhaka Medical College Hospital and Uttara IC Mother and Child Hospital. The rest were admitted to different clinics in the locality.

The attack took place as the workers started demonstration to press home their 22-point charter of demands at about 9:30am.

The demands included suspension of the company's general manager Kamruzzaman, production manager Abdul Khaleque, supervisor Asad and three others for physical and financial harassment of workers.

Jasim and Rezaul, two knitting operators of the factory who were leading the demonstration, told journalists that they set on Monday a six-day ultimatum for the management to meet their demands.

'The management assured us of meeting all the demands, except for suspension of the six officials,' Rezaul said.

He alleged that the Kamruzzaman, Khaleque and Asad had led the attack on the workers.

Masud, who was injured in the attack, alleged that Forkan, Akash, Mominul, Ripon and 20-30 others had taken part in the attack and roughed up the workers.

'When the gang attacked us, the management did not call the police,' he said. 'They called the police when the attack was over.'

The workers continued their demonstration till 2:30pm in the presence of three platoons of police and the Rapid Action Battalion, who had been deployed in the factory after the attack.

They left the scene only after the factory management had assured them of meeting their demands immediately.

Meanwhile, in a press release, signed by Kihak Sung, on behalf of the Bangladesh Export Processing Zone Investors Association, said the association was pleased to announce that after a fruitful meeting with the new BEPZA chairman, it decided that the factories inside the DEPZ should reopen on June 8.

Most of the factories in the areas adjoining the DEPZ and Gazipur, except the ones damaged or ransacked during the recent labour unrest, continued production on Wednesday without any disturbance.

Huge members of the police, the paramilitary Bangladesh Rifles and the Rapid Action Battalion remain deployed in front of the exclusive zone and most of the factories to avert any untoward incident.

BEPZA said it had already taken all necessary steps to ensure smooth operation of all factories located in old and new zones of the Dhaka Export Processing Zone.

A labour leader of the area told New Age, 'We have already announced the reopening of the DEPZ through megaphones and informed all workers to join from Thursday morning.'

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<http://www.newagebd.com/2006/jun/10/front.html#e>

## **Fresh unrest in RMG sector**

Staff Correspondent

Workers of a factory at Zirani in Ashulia demonstrated for increase in their salaries and payment of arrears and overtime bills on Thursday night, 16 hours after the operation resumed at the Dhaka export processing zones.

The workers alleged that some hoodlums, hired by the management, had swooped on them and injured ten of them.

The Ashulia police arrested five workers on charge of vandalism after the owner of the factory had filed a case.

According to witnesses, workers of Liberty Fashion on Mannan College Road started work abstention and staged demonstration Thursday night demanding increase in their salaries and payment of arrears and overtime bills within the second day of every month.

At one stage, some hoodlums, allegedly hired by the management, swooped on the demonstrators and roughed them up.

The attack only fuelled the wrath of the workers, who went on the rampage, damaging windowpanes, computers, furniture and machinery of the factory.

As the officials and their hired hands tried to resist them, clashes ensued. Ten workers were injured in the hour-long clashes. They were admitted to different local clinics.

The Ashulia police and the Rapid Action Battalion later went to the scene and brought the situation under control at about 8:30pm.

Mozammel Haque, owner of the Liberty Fashion, filed a case with the Ashulia police station, accusing 200 workers of vandalising the factory.

'We have arrested Azahar Ali, Zahirul Islam, Sanwar Hossain, Sohel Ahmed and Abul Kalam Azad from the scene and produced them before the court on Friday,' the investigation officer of the case, Sub-inspector Mokhlesur Rahman, told New Age.

'As the workers demanded their legal rights we produced them before the court on Friday without seeking any police remand,' he added.

A tense situation is prevailing in the area as the workers decided to continue work abstention until their demands were met and their colleagues released.

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<http://www.newagebd.com/2006/jun/11/front.html#4>

## **Labour unrest continues**

### **BGMEA-garment workers meet ends in fiasco, RMG strike Monday**

BDNEWS . Dhaka

A countrywide all-out strike in garment sector will be observed on Monday as a meeting between the leaders of the Bangladesh Garments Manufacturers and Exporters' Association and Garment Sramik Jote over fixing minimum wage ended in fiasco Saturday.

Meanwhile, skirmishes between police and garment factory workers and also two groups of workers erupted in Savar, Gazipur and Tongi Saturday morning.

At least 40 people were injured in the clashes.

Earlier, Garments Sramik O' Shilpa Rakkha Jatiya Mancha called a countrywide all-out strike in garment sector on June 12 for implementation of their 5-point charter of demands.

The demands include fixing basic wage of garment factory workers at Tk 3000, ensuring security at workplaces, providing compulsory weekly holiday and free trade union rights.

Meeting sources said, the Jote demanded that BGMEA must fix the minimum wage and dearness allowance at Tk 3000 for each garment worker till the national wage commission fixes minimum national wage for the garment factory workers.

The parties of the meeting failed to agree on the issues.

The Jote leaders at an impromptu press conference said the earlier announced all-out strike in garment sector would be observed across the country.

BDNEWS Savar correspondent reports: At least 20 workers were injured as police and RAB personnel charged baton on them while they were staging demonstration at a garment factory in Savar Saturday demanding timely payment of salaries.

Police went on action when workers of Liberty Fashion at Mannan College Road at Jirani area under Shimulia union in a procession tried to come out of the factory at about 10 in the morning.

Police also detained eight workers. The workers made a 12-point charter of demands in the memorandum.

BDNEWS Gazipur correspondent adds: At least 20 people were injured in a clash between two groups of workers at 'Daewoo Bangladesh', a Korean garment factory, at Bhannara area of Kaliakoir in Gazipur Saturday.



The authorities closed the factory after the incident.

Meanwhile, several hundred workers of Liberty garments at Ziranibazar Goabari area in Gazipur, put up barricades on Nabinagar-Kaliakoir highway demanding release of the detained workers.

Besides, the authorities of Dana Garments at Sardaganj of Kashimpur union closed the factory due to labour unrest.

Sources said two groups of workers of Korean garment factory Daewoo Bangladesh were locked in a clash Saturday morning as a sequel to dispute between the production manager and the assistant production manager.

At least 20 workers were injured in the incident.

Policemen and RAB members rushed to the spot and brought the situation under control.

After the incident the authorities closed the factory Saturday afternoon.

Several hundred workers of Liberty garments at Ziranibazar Goabari area in Gazipur, stopped working and staged demonstration at about 10am demanding release of the detained workers.

They also put up barricades on Nabinagar-Kaliakoir highway bringing the traffic movement to a halt.

On information, police rushed to the spot and managed to make the agitating workers leave the spot peacefully.

Meanwhile, the authorities of Dana Garments closed the factory till Thursday following a labour unrest.

BDNEWS Tongi correspondent reports: The workers of National Fan Factory at BSCIC Industrial Estate in Tongi staged a demonstration and held a rally Saturday in demand of making their jobs permanent.

Besides, the workers of New Munnu Fine Cotton Factory staged a demonstration at about 4pm Saturday protesting corruption of the factory's directors.

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<http://www.newagebd.com/2006/jun/13/front.html#1>

## **Memo signed on workers' wages, facilities**

Staff Correspondent

A 10-point memorandum of understanding was signed on Monday between the government, and workers and owners of the apparel industry towards institution of minimum wages and legitimate facilities for workers within the next three months.

The state minister for labour and employment, Amanullah Aman, seven leaders of the Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters' Association and the Bangladesh Knitwear Manufacturers and Exporters' Association and 17 leaders of different labour organisations signed the memorandum.

The memorandum covers major demands of the workers, who went on violent agitations on May 22, resulting in damage and destruction of a number of RMG factories in and around the capital city.

The agitations led to a tripartite meeting on May 24 where a 10-point charter of workers' demands was raised. The demands were later reviewed at similar tripartite meetings on June 1 and June 4.

The memorandum stipulates that the minimum wage commission, formed on May 31, will review and fix minimum wages for workers as soon as possible to be implemented at all RMG factories within the next three months.

It also says the factories yet to ensure legitimate facilities for workers at the workplace will do so within the next one month.

Workers will be paid overtime for any amount of work they do after a scheduled 8-hour workday as per labour laws and provided with appointment letters and identity cards. Women workers will be entitled to maternity leave with full payment.



The memorandum also says cases filed against workers during the recent labour unrest will be withdrawn and those arrested released. No worker will be punished or removed for his or her involvement in the unrest.

It regrets the violence and loss of lives and property during the unrest and says steps will be taken to root out possibilities of further flare-ups.

‘The government expects the memorandum to remove all misunderstandings,’ Aman said.

Shahadat Hossain Chowdhury, a BGMEA vice-president, said the association would put in special efforts to implement facilities workers are entitled to at all factories.

The coordinator of Sramik-Karmachari Oikya Parishad, the national umbrella organisation for workers, Wajedul Islam, said all the parties would monitor the implementation of the memorandum.

Among the signatories were BGMEA president Tipu Munshi, Shahadat Hossain, BKMEA president Fazlul Hoque and BKMEA director MA Baset.

Among the signatory labour leaders were SKOP coordinator Wajedul Islam, Roy Ramesh Chandra and Shahjahan Khan MP of the Sramik League, Jafrul Hasan of Sramik Dal, Nurul Islam of the Trade Union Centre, Abdul Kader Hawlader of Sramik Jote Bangladesh, Mokhlesur Rahman of the Sangjukta Sramik Federation and Abdullah Sarkar of the Samajtantrik Sramik Front.

Earlier the meeting was told that the government had formed several inspection teams for monitoring workers condition at factories in Dhaka and Chittagong.

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## **Violence at DEPZ factory**

Staff Correspondent

One of the largest factories in the Dhaka export processing zone was forced to suspend production on Monday after workers went on the rampage over the alleged assault on a female colleague.

The trouble began when the news broke that the deputy general manager of Young One, Asgar Ali, had assaulted Lata, who is pregnant.

She was a member of the group that had gone to Asgar’s room to complain against the management’s refusal to accept the workers’ demands.

The workers alleged that Lata had lost consciousness when assaulted. They also alleged that the management denied them of half day’s salary for May 31 when it was closed following violence whereas the supervisors and other officials received full day’s pay for the day.

As the news spread, about 8,000 workers came out of the factory and started demonstrating against the management. At one stage, they assaulted Asgar and several other officials, triggering a clash between the officials and the workers.

At least 30 people were injured in the clash and some offices of the factory vandalised. Lata was taken to Dhaka for treatment. Others were admitted to a clinic at Savar and the factory’s own medical centre.

The workers also confined some officials, including Asgar, into their offices.

Later, a DEPZ general manager, AZM Azizur Rahman, went to the factory at about 11:30am and succeeded to bring the situation under control.

The executive chairman of the Bangladesh Export Processing Zones Authority, Brigadier General Ashraf Abdullah Yussuf, went to the factory at about 2:30pm and assured the workers of taking stern action against the people responsible for the incident.

He told the workers that he would take necessary steps so that the workers would get salaries as per the BEPZA rules.

He said a meeting would be held with the factory management on Tuesday.

The workers left the factory when Ashraf Abdullah announced closure of the factory for the day at about 3:00pm.

## **8 of 84 DEPZ RMG units closed**

*Four to resume production today*

Staff Correspondent

Unrest by workers and shortage of raw materials have forced suspension of operation at eight of the 84 readymade garment factories in the Dhaka export processing zones.

Red Point Jacket Limited, Hoplone Textile and Paddocks Jeans, which were closed amid labour unrest on Tuesday, will resume operation on Thursday, sources in the Bangladesh Export Processing Zones Authority said.

A-1, a sister concern of Youngone, which was set ablaze by some miscreants on May 22, will also reopen on Thursday.

However, Youngone of Korea, which was closed on Monday following workers' unrest over an alleged assault on pregnant worker by its deputy general manager, may take a few more days to resume operation.

'The management of these four factories decided to resume production on Thursday following BEPZA intervention and Youngone would resume in a few days,' the BEPZA executive chairman, Brigadier General Ashraf Abdullah Yussuf, told journalists on Wednesday. 'The owner of Youngone assured me that it would resume work very soon.'

Meanwhile, hundred of workers of Red Point factory staged demonstration demanding punishment for eight suspected criminals, who were caught early Tuesday inside the factory and handed over to the police.

They also shouted slogans against the owners, who had supposedly hired them to attack the workers, and demanded exemplary punishment for them.

Ashraf Abdullah and the BEPZA general manager, AZM Azizur Rahman, later went to the factory and brought the situation under control.

The BEPZA chairman assured the workers that the factory would be reopened on Thursday and that punitive action would be taken against the arrested eight.

He also visited the closed factories on Wednesday and discussed issues concerning the workers as well as the owners.

Hundreds of workers of Dada (Savar) Limited, Bankon Sweater Limited and Tista High Fashion limited came to join work in the morning but the authorities informed them that they could not release raw materials from the depot at Kamalapur because of hartal (general strike).

Later, the workers of the three factories left the place after being assured that the factory would be reopened on Thursday.

The authorities of the four factories closed operation on Tuesday when agitated workers started work abstention and staged demonstrations at around 9:30am in front of the factories to press home their demands.

Youngone was also declared closed the same day for indefinite period following a clash on Monday over assault on female workers.

The Ashulia police said Joynal Abedin, the investigation officer of the case, had sent the eight suspected criminals to the court on Tuesday and the court sent them to jail.

## **6 DEPZ factories resume work**

Staff Correspondent

Six of the eight readymade garment factories in the Dhaka export processing zone which were forced to suspend operation because of the recent labour unrest and shortage of raw materials

resumed production Thursday morning.

Red Point Jacket Limited, Hoplone Textile and Paddocks Jeans were closed amid labour unrest on Tuesday while Dada (Savar) Limited, Bankon Sweater

Limited and Tista High Fashion had to suspend operation on Wednesday, as the 36-hour hartal (general strike) by opposition political parties resulted in a shortage of raw materials.

‘The six factories resumed production in the morning without any incident,’ the general manager of the Bangladesh Export Processing Zones Authority, AZM Azizur

Rahman, said when talking to New Age. ‘Youngone and its sister concern A1 will also resume very soon.’

A1, which was set ablaze by some miscreants on May 22, had been scheduled to reopen on Thursday. However, the authorities deferred the resumption of operation till Saturday as renovation and repair were yet to be finished.

‘Although A-1 had been scheduled to reopen on Thursday but its management decided to reopen it on Saturday after the weekly holiday on Friday,’ Azizur Rahman said.

Youngone of Korea, which was closed on Monday following labour unrest over an alleged assault on pregnant worker by its deputy general manager, may take a few more days to resume operation, as agitated workers severely vandalised the factory, BEPZA sources said.

Meanwhile, a meeting between the EPZ authority and the Bangladesh Export Processing Zone Investors’ Association at the BEPZA Complex resolved that the closed factories should be reopened as soon as possible.

The new BEPZA chairman, Brigadier General Ashraf Abdullah Yussuf, and other senior officials and foreign investors were present in the meeting.

‘We would take punitive actions against violators of the BEPZA Act whoever they may be – investors or workers – and exemplary punishment would be meted out against the hoodlums,’ Ashraf Abdullah said when talking to journalists after the meeting.

Kihak Sung, vice-president of the Youngone Group and BEPZIA chairman, told the meeting that their factories would be reopened step by step.

A1 will be opened on Saturday as part of the decision, he said.

Ashraf Abdullah, Azizur Rahman, senior BEPZA officials and foreign investors visited the factories in the morning.

A huge contingent of the police, the Rapid Action Battalion and the paramilitary Bangladesh Rifles were

deployed in front of the exclusive zone and in and outsides of some factories.

Investors have, meanwhile, blamed the media for what they term ‘fuelling’ intermittent labour unrest that struck the industrial belt in the exclusive zone.

Kihak said both the print and electronic media had carried fabricated reports on recent incidents in the export processing zones.

‘You should be more careful when preparing your news items as it is a matter of the image of your country,’ he said.

A high official of FCI, a company whose managing director is the finance minister’s son Kaiser Rahman, during the press briefing session with Ashraf Abdullah sprang up from his chair in rage, as he dished out criticism of the media.

‘These media people don’t know anything and make baseless news that encouraged agitating workers,’ he said.

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<http://www.newagebd.com/2006/jun/18/front.html#10>

## **Fresh labour unrest in four factories at DEPZ**

*BEPZA holds meeting with striking workers*

Staff Correspondent

Workers of four garment factories located at Dhaka Export Processing Zone, started work abstention and staged demonstration on Saturday to push their 12-point demand.

The Bangladesh Export Processing Zone Authority held a meeting with the representatives of the striking workers of the four garment factories — Youngone, A-1, Paddocks Jeans Limited and Gold Tex Industry — in the evening to resolve the crisis.

BEPZA sources said Youngone resumed production at its knitting and dying sections on Saturday, but the garments division of the factory remained closed.

Most of the workers of the garments division came to join work in the morning, but they returned as the authorities continued the closure.

Youngone was closed on Monday following assault on a pregnant worker by the deputy general manager of the factory.

The authorities of A-1 Industry, which was set on fire on May 22 by angry workers, had planned to resume production at the factory on Saturday.

Most of the workers came to join work in the morning, but became angry when they saw Humayun Ahmed, manager (administration), and Monjur Hossain, security officer, inside the factory, and started work abstention.

The angry workers demanded removal of the two officials.

Meanwhile, a few hundred workers of Paddocks Jeans Limited came to join work, but as they came to know that the authorities had fulfilled their demands except lunch allowance, they staged demonstration and began work abstention.

The workers of Gold Tex Industry started work abstention and staged demonstration demanding resignation of some dishonest officials. They left the factory when the authorities declared the day a holiday.

Hearing the news of unrest, the newly appointed chairman of the BEPZA, Brigadier General Ashraf Abdullah Yusuf, along with general manager, AZM Azizur Rahman, and other senior officials went to the spot and tried to calm the situation.

They also arranged a meeting between the BEPZA, factory managements and the representatives of the workers to resolve the crisis.

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<http://www.thedailystar.net/2006/06/19/d6061901022.htm>

# The Daily Star

Committed to PEOPLE'S RIGHT TO KNOW

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Front Page

## **Cops club agitating workers at DEPZ**

*100 injured, scores of vehicles damaged*

JU Correspondent

More than 100 people were injured as police charged truncheons and lobbed teargas shells on workers' demonstrations at Dhaka Export Processing Zone (DEPZ) yesterday.

Several thousand workers of A-one (BD) Ltd, garments section of Goldtex Ltd and Softex Ltd staged demonstrations after they came to know about indefinite closure of their factories.

The three factories were closed since following a meeting between factory owners and DEPZ General Manager AZM Azizur Rahman on Saturday night.

The workers of A-one (BD) Ltd, which was closed following the workers' unrest as it was severely damaged, became violent around 8:30am after seeing the indefinite closure notice at the main gate of the factory. They had gone to the factory yesterday to know when their demands would be met and when it would reopen.

The workers marched towards Actors Sporting Ltd and shouted slogans in support of their demands as Rapid Action Battalion (Rab), police and Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) men asked them to leave the area. As soon as they reached Actors Sporting Ltd, a few thousand of workers of Goldtex Ltd joined them.

The demonstrators started hurling brickbats at the windowpanes of Actors Sporting Ltd. Police charged truncheons to disperse the demonstrators triggering chases and counter chases.

The demonstrators went to the DEPZ office where more than one thousand workers of Softex Ltd joined them around 9:00am.

Police clubbed the agitators again to disperse them triggering chases and counter chases there too. The agitating workers resorted to throwing brickbats at the police. Police lobbed at least 12 teargas canisters into the demonstrators.

The demonstrators went on a rampage on Dhaka-Baipail-Kaliakoir highway around 9:30am and vandalised at least 100 vehicles during skirmishes with the law enforcement agencies, disrupting vehicular movement for two hours. Police and Rab charged truncheons again and fired several teargas shells.

However, Paddock's Jeans Ltd, closed on June 13, resumed operation yesterday.

Authorities of Anzir Apparels Ltd at Baipail closed their factory fearing violence as angry demonstrators of DEPZ on their return vandalised windowpanes of the factory, factory authorities said.

Around five thousand workers of Haesong Corporation Ltd in Baroipara refrained from work yesterday as their demands were not met. The workers stopped operations as factory authorities did not increase the 'piece rate' [payment per piece of product they work on]. Factory authorities give them low piece rate and it varies from worker to worker, alleged the workers of the factory.

Meanwhile, workers of five garment factories demonstrated in support of their 17-point demand in Gazipur yesterday. Clashes between pro-owner workers and general workers left nine people injured in Stylo Fashions in Gazipur yesterday. Two other garment factories, Jahan Tex and Rebit Tex, in Gazipur were also closed following workers' demonstrations.

"Law enforcers have taken necessary steps to maintain law and order inside the DEPZ," said Bangladesh Export Processing Zones Authority's (Bepza) Executive Chairman Ashraf Abdullah Yussuf adding, "Eighty factories out of the 84 are now operational while Youngone is likely to resume operation from today."

Hoping resumption of work at the closed factories soon, Yussuf said, "Factory owners are willing to implement Bepza rules while members of Workers Representative Welfare Committee of 66 factories in a meeting on Saturday night assured me of keeping peace inside DEPZ."

Punishment to the allegedly guilty mid-level officials would be meted out after investigations," he added.

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<http://www.newagebd.com/2006/jun/19/front.html#1>

## **DEPZ turns into battle field again**

*200 injured, 100 vehicles damaged, 4 factories closed in Gazipur*

Arif Newaz Farazi



Several thousand garment workers clashed with the police, damaged more than a hundred vehicles and blocked the Nabinagar-Kaliakoir Highway on Sunday, injuring about 200 people in front of the Dhaka Export Processing Zone at Savar.

The workers of three factories inside the export processing zone went on the rampage at the closure notice for an indefinite period of the factories at around 7:30am. They brought out a procession in protest at the incident.

They also damaged a factory by pelting stones and clashed with the police when the law enforcers charged at them with batons.

The police also lobbed tear gas canister while the workers pelted stones, in which about 200 people, including the Ashulia police officer-in-charge, were injured.

The workers took to the streets and blocked the Nabinagar-Kaliakoir Highway and damaged more than 100 vehicles lining along the road.

Traffic remained suspended on the Nabinagar-Kaliakoir and Tongi-Ashulia roads for more than two hours.

Production was suspended at four factories in the zone on Sunday; the workers also damaged a factory at Baipail by pelting stones.

Witness said hundreds of workers of A-1 and Gold Tex factories went to join work in the morning; but they found the factories closed for an indefinite period. But the Actor factory, a sister concern of Gold Tex, continued operation.

Angered, the workers went out on demonstrations and asked the Actor factory workers to join hands with them.

As the Actor workers declined to join them, the groups began clashes. The workers smashed some windowpanes of the Actor factory.

The police and the Rapid Action Battalion went to the place and dispersed the agitators.

The workers then went out on demonstrations in front of the main BEPZA gate and chanted slogans against the owners.

The law enforcers again charged at the agitators with batons and lobbed tear gas shells and the workers barricaded the Nabinagar-Kaliakoir and again went on the rampage.

They also began damaging more than 100 vehicles stranded on the road for the disorder, the passengers of the vehicles, especially women and children shouted for help during the vandalism. At least 10 passengers sustained injuries during the rampage.

Several hundred workers of the Soft Tex factory joined hands with them as the authorities of the factory closed the concern for an indefinite period.

The workers also smashed some windowpanes of the Angir factory at Baipail.

Ten injured female workers were admitted to BEPZA Hospital; the injured policemen, including the officer-in-charge, Obeydul Haque, were given medical treatment in a private clinic.

Sources in BEPZA said the Youngone authorities decided to resume production in their units on Sunday; but as the workers assaulted a female supervisor on Saturday, the authorities decided to keep the units closed.

The workers said they went on the rampage demanding resignation of some corrupt officials. The intelligence sources, meanwhile, said some outsiders also joined the workers during vandalism.

The new BEPZA chairman, Ashraf Abdullah Yusuf, told journalists, after a fruitful discussion with worker leaders, that such incidents are painful.

More policemen and the personnel of the Bangladesh Rifles and the Rapid Action Battalion were deployed in and outside the zone.

The New Age correspondent in Gazipur said some outsiders loyal to owners attacked the workers and injured them while the workers went out on demonstrations to push for their 12-points demands.

Fearing further clashes, the authorities of the Styleo Fashion, Hey Chung Corporation, NTKC Industry and Rabty Factory announced a holiday on Sunday.

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<http://www.newagebd.com/2006/jun/20/front.html#13>

## **Most RMG units in DEPZ resume work**

*4 factories still shut; labour leader arrested*

Staff Correspondent-Arif Newaz

Following the violent clashes between workers and law enforcers at four factories on Sunday, 80 among 84 readymade garment factories in the Dhaka Export Processing Zone continued smooth operations on Monday, said sources in the Bangladesh Export Processing Zone Authority.

The four factories — Korea-based A-1, Paddocks Jeans, Soft Tex and Gold Tex — were yet to resume work on Monday, but Soft Tex partially resumed production.

The agitated workers of the four factories in the Dhaka Export Processing Zone, started work abstention and staged demonstrations for their 12-point demands on Saturday.

The export processing zone authority sources said Youngone resumed production at its knitting and dying sections on Saturday but the garments division remained closed for an indefinite period.

Later, Youngone was closed on June 12, after its deputy general manager beat up a pregnant worker.

‘Youngone started its full-fledged production since Monday morning after BEPZA intervention and assurance,’ BEPZA general manager AZM Azizur Rahman told New Age.

‘The authority of A-1, a sister concern of Youngone, where the miscreants set ablaze on May 22, is expected resume production immediately,’ said Aziz.

‘Certain vested quarters tried to harm production but they will not succeed as we always provide all kinds support for full-fledged production at all factories,’ said Aziz. He also said the authorities had been able to trace the kingpins who led the unrest.

Workers of Gold Tex, Soft Tex, and A-1 started work abstention demanding resignation of some corrupt officials while workers of Paddocks Jeans staged a demonstration demanding lunch.

Meanwhile, Ashulia police arrested Zahidul Islam Zahid, mastermind of Sunday’s workers’ unrest in the Dhaka Export Processing Zone, from Baipail in Savar early Monday.

Sub-inspector Abul Hayat Talukdar of Ashulia police station filed a case accusing 13 persons, including Zahid on Sunday for vandalising Actor Sporting during Sunday’s mayhem.

Upon a tip off, the police conducted a raid at the house of Zahid, a labour leader, as he was holding a meeting at about 1:00am to wage a fresh violent movement in the industrial belt.

Among others Siraj Sarkar, Dr Sarwar, Shamsul Alam, Shahenshah and Kajal were present at the meeting but manage to flee.

The police produced him before a court on Monday seeking a seven-day police remand but the court granted a five-day remand.



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## **Gazipur garment workers go berserk after accident**

A Correspondent, Gazipur

At least 30 people including six policemen were injured when garment workers clashed with law enforcers and blockaded Dhaka-Mymensingh highway for three hours after rumours spread that their three colleagues died in a road accident.

The agitated workers torched three buses, vandalised 12 vehicles on the highway and attacked policemen and fire engines that went there to bring the situation under control.

The workers also pelted brickbats on several garment factories when law enforcers took shelter there in the face of workers' attack. The incident compelled eight factories to shutdown production for the day.

Witnesses said a Chandana-bound bus from Sadarghat in Dhaka ran over three garment employees - Kamal Hossain, 24, Sarker, 22, Yakub Ali, 36, -- at Signboard Bus Stand area around 8:00am.

The three were rushed to Tongi 50-bed Government Hospital, from where Kamal was shifted to Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH).

As police rushed to the spot to clear the blockade, the agitating workers attacked the law enforcers who in their defence took shelter in nearby garment factories.

Several policemen including the Superintendent of Police (SP) of Gazipur Atiqul Islam and Officer-in-charge of Jaydevpur Police Station Kamrul Islam were injured in the attack.

The unruly workers then took control of around four-kilometre of highway from Borobari to Maleker Bari. The incident left stranded vehicles in gridlocks.

The workers also prevented fire engines from extinguishing the vehicles in flames. They hurled brickbats on the fire engines which also hit Deputy Assistant Director of Fire Service Shahidur Rahman.

Police around 9:30am fired eight gunshots into the air and lobbed 15 teargas shells to disperse the mob.

Vehicular movement on the highway was restored around 11:00am after police were reinforced by the deployment of Rapid Action Battalion (Rab), riot police.

Meanwhile, the workers of the attacked factories held three men -- Shafiqul Alam, 24, Monir Hossain, 22, and Iqbal, 23, -- and handed them over to police for their alleged involvement in vandalism.



*A policeman oversees a tow truck's removal of a burned bus on the Dhaka-Gazipur highway yesterday after angry garment workers fanned by a rumour torched the vehicle. PHOTO: STAR*

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<http://libcom.org/news/article.php/bangladesh-garment-revolt-140706>

## **Garment workers revolt in Bangladesh**

Friday, July 14 2006 @ 11:25 AM GMT-1

*A working class revolt in Bangladesh  
Strike, riot and fire among the garment workers  
RM, for libcom.org news*

In late May and through June this year, there has been a wave of fierce class struggle in the Bangladesh garment industry. To illustrate the scale of events: around 4000 factories in Dhaka went on wildcat strike, 16 factories were burnt down by strikers and hundreds more ransacked and looted, pitched battles were fought with cops and private security forces in workplaces and workers' neighbourhoods, main roads were blocked. Casualties include 3 workers shot dead, thousands injured, several thousand jailed. The Government eventually felt compelled to bring in the Army to restore 'order'. It was a working class revolt that spread beyond the workplace and generalised to involve the wider working class community. At present (early July) the struggle continues in the garment zones on a lesser scale.

(Note; figures quoted from different sources vary - I have generally taken the most commonly quoted.)

### ***The Dhaka explosion***

The revolt began on **Saturday 20th May** in Sripur in the Gazipur district of Dhaka. 1,000 garment workers gathered at FS Sweater Factory, refusing to work until 3 arrested fellow workers were released from custody. The factory bosses locked the striking workers in the factory, cutting the power and water supplies. Eventually, the sweltering heat proved too much and by 11 am the workers fought their way out, then gathered on the Dhaka-Mymensingh highway. Now joined by locals, they barricaded the highway for 6 hours and fought pitched battles with the cops.[1] One person was killed and 70 others, including cops and journalists, were injured.

On the morning of **Monday, 22 May** at Savar Export Processing Zone (EPZ), a suburb of Dhaka, workers at Universal Garments Limited gathered in front of the factory to demand payment of 3 months owed back wages. They were attacked by factory security staff. In response the workers went to neighboring factories and called out other garment workers for support. The growing group of workers then went from factory to factory calling on other workers to join them; 20,000 workers are reported to have joined this angry procession. By the afternoon hundreds of other factories in Savar EPZ and New EPZ had joined the strikes. Two factories were torched and 100s more ransacked, over 300 hundred company and management vehicles wrecked. The main roads going through Dhaka were blocked. Eventually the clashes with police escalated and the cops responded with bullets. The news of the escalation spread among the workplaces and drew out most other workers into participating.

*>"The day the 'riot' broke out I had been on my way to office. Its not new these agitations here in my locality (lot of RMG [Ready Made Garment] factories are situated here)... I have been witnessing this from a year or more.... What struck me most was how this sort of happening readily unified street vendors, rickshawwallas in one single angry 'mob', which was throwing stones, crashing cars, setting fire on big VOLVO buses. If its sort of an anarchy, I am for it with some fears inside....." - eyewitness, 26/May/06*

By **Tuesday (23rd)** the revolt spread to more factories as more workers were picketed out and the industrial areas of Dhaka were shut down by a generalised strike. Workers took the revolt from the industrial suburbs, where factories were now being looted, into the capital city itself, destroying cars and attacking commercial buildings. Mass demonstrations demanded an end to repression, release of arrested workers, higher minimum wages, weekly time off, overtime pay for extra work, public holidays, payment of wages due etc. (All these demands have since been agreed to.) Press photographers were attacked, roads were blocked and clashes with security forces continued. Thousands of strikers descended on factories, torching 4 and ransacking hundreds more. The Bangladesh Rifles were recalled from their normal duties as Border Control and deployed across the areas of unrest. By the evening 3,000 soldiers and armed cops were in occupation.

The garment industry bosses were now urging the government to protect all factories with troops. The garment owners also staged their own quite pathetic little demonstration, lying down in the road in protest at the attacks on their business. For news footage of the revolt and meetings of panicked bosses, see; <http://www.shuchinta.com/2006/05/25/some-clips-from-the-atn-news-on-the-attack-on-garments-industries/>

On **Wednesday (24th)** things calmed down in face of the massive police/army presence. The bosses were showing signs of being willing to make some concessions, though still refusing to allow the right to organise trade unions. It is at present difficult to know if this is a demand voiced by the unions or if it has much support among workers themselves. Union leaders were brought in to negotiate a deal with the bosses. This was a breach of the garment bosses' longstanding opposition to union recognition; also a recognition of unions' useful potential role in containing struggle.

Throughout **June**, clashes in the garment producing areas have continued, the main issues being victimisation of militants, back pay, non-implementation of previously agreed concessions. Strikes continually break out at individual factories, workers nearby stop work to join in the spontaneous demonstrations. Clashes with police, army and factory security continue, as do attacks on company property. Bosses have also sometimes locked out workers from factories when the breakdown in workplace discipline has become too explosive. At times whole EPZ areas are closed off by troops. This is made easier, once the workers have been driven out, as these industrial zones are fenced off and have their own checkpoints - complete with customs posts - due to their exceptional economic and tax status. The garment owners are dragging their feet in implementing the concessions, so workers remain continually in conflict with the bosses.

The garment bosses have estimated their losses from the revolt so far at \$70 million (and rising!) in a compensation claim submitted to the government. They have criticised the government's indecisiveness in dealing with the revolt. The BGMEA have demanded that a permanent industrial police force be set up to protect factory property in the event of future unrest. At present the Rapid Action Battalion, an armed police/paramilitary grouping is fulfilling this role. As the strikes at individual factories continue and often spread to neighbouring workplaces, the RAB are rushed in to attempt to disperse the angry crowds. But this does not encourage a return to work and invites sympathy and similar action from neighbouring workers.

A recent report states; *"The owners declared suspension of work at the apparel manufacturing units at Jamgorah, Zirabo and Ashulia in Savar on Tuesday amid an escalating labour unrest that left at least 100 people injured and 20 vehicles damaged.*

*The crisis came to a head as workers of Irish Fashion started a furious demonstration in front of the garment factory over a rumoured murder of a co-worker on Monday night and closure of the factory for indefinite period since Tuesday morning.*

*The angry workers went on the rampage, clashed with police and damaged about 20 vehicles, including two staff buses of a factory, during the mayhem.... Witnesses said following the Monday night's violence at Irish Fashion, hundreds of workers of the factory came to work at around 7:00am. But, they found a notice hung on the main gate saying the factory was closed for indefinite period.*

*Enraged, the nearly 6,000 workers of the seven-storey factory immediately tore the notice into pieces, went on the warpath and started demonstrating.*

*Fearing attack, police stationed inside the factory remained silent and did not come out to disperse the agitating workers.*

*The mob pelted brickbats at and forced some other factories to close, and chanted slogans, urging workers of those plants to join forces with it.*

*Most of the factories in the areas declared closure of work. Within a few minutes, the majority of workers of those factories joined hands with their agitating fellows and brought out a procession....*

*Fearing further vandalism, the authorities announced closure of over 50 factories located in the areas adjoining to the Dhaka Export Processing Zone for indefinite period..... A tense situation is prevailing in the areas, with many contingents of police, the paramilitary Bangladesh Rifles and the Rapid Action Battalion deployed in front of the DEPZ and at others key points." (New Age, 5/July/06)*

*"The government agreed to release arrested workers and union officials, and to drop the cases against them. It also promised to set up a "minimum wage board for the garment sector and take steps to meet the demands of garment workers," and -- in a bow to the manufacturers -- to investigate the causes of the riots." (Power and Interest News Report; [http://pinr.com/report.php?ac=view\\_report&report\\_id=500&language\\_id=1](http://pinr.com/report.php?ac=view_report&report_id=500&language_id=1))*

*"Following the unrest in the garment sector, the factory owners at a tripartite meeting late last month accepted almost all demands of the garment workers, including the right to form trade unions, weekly holiday, maternity leave and issuance of appointment letter and identity card (these letters and cards are proof of employment and are often withheld to prevent workers later claiming back pay when they are dismissed). The meeting formed a minimum wage board comprising representatives from the government, the garment factory owners and SKOP[workers' representatives] as the workers demanded increase of minimum salary from Tk 940 [£7. 59/Eur10. 97/\$14. 03] to Tk 3,000 [£22. 24/Eur 35. 03/\$44. 79] because of the unprecedented price hikes of essentials." (New Age, 29/June/06) So far, as unrest in the factories continues, the bosses are resisting agreeing to a minimum wage of Tk 3,000. (An average 30% wage rise.)*

\* \* \*

## *The globalized sweatshop*

Below we will briefly describe general working conditions and some background to the revolt:

*"Bangladesh is endowed with abundant and cheap labour force that is easily trainable and convertible into semi-skilled and skilled work force. Price, heavily weighted by the labour cost, is one of the main determinants of comparative advantage in the labour-intensive garment industry. The price of labour in our country is lower compared to some of our neighbouring countries as well as some other garment producing countries in South-East Asia and East Europe. Obviously, existence of such cheap but easily trainable labour is one of the advantages that Bangladesh enjoys and will be enjoying over a considerable period in the context of international trade on clothing."*(Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association [GMEA] website.)

"The garment workers of Bangladesh may be the most deprived labor force in the world. Most are paid between US\$14 to US\$16 per month, the lowest salary in the world". - Amirul Haq Amin, Coordinator of the Bangladesh Garment Workers Unity Council (BGWUC), 2005.

*"I get Tk 900 [£7. 27/Eur10. 50/\$13. 43] for a month of hard labour which is not enough to even cover my food bills,' said a worker at Tejgaon. 'Can you show me one worker who runs his family without a hitch with the money he gets?"* - Sagar, who works in SS Sweater factory.

*"Bangladesh's apparel sector now employ 2.5 million in more than 5,000 factories and the largest industrial sector contribute more than 75 per cent to the country's export earnings."* (New Age, 30/June/06) [2.5 million is the highest and most recently quoted figure for workers - most sources say 1.5 -1.8million.]

*" In February 2005, the International Textile, Garment and Leather Workers' Federation found that the [official] monthly minimum wage for Bangladesh's garment workers was some \$33 ten years ago, but that came down to \$16 in real value due to devaluation of Bangladesh Taka against dollar.*

*The Brussels-based organisation shows that in India and Pakistan, an apparel worker gets at least 20 cents per hour, in China 23 cents, in Sri Lanka 40 cents while in Thailand the worker is paid 78 cents. "* (Bangladesh trotskyist Democratic Workers Party.)

This is the modern face of 'Globalization'. Capital goes where there is surplus labour to be had cheapest, installs its plant machinery and begins to extract profits. Equally, local capital sees an opportunity to utilise cheap local labour for the global market. In 1978 the Bangladesh government set up Export Processing Zones (EPZs) to attract foreign capital and earn export dollars. (100% foreign ownership, 65%; joint venture, 13%; 100% local venture, 22%.) In 1993 the Bangladesh Export Processing Zone Authority (BEPZA) was set up and a blanket ban on trade union activity imposed. An attractive investment location for investors, also including tax breaks and other incentives. The EPZs now employ 70,000 workers, mostly in the garment and shoe-making industries (though most of the garment industry exists outside the EPZs). National labour laws do not apply in the EPZs, leaving BEPZA in full control over work conditions, wages and benefits. The garment industry is the life blood of the Bangladesh economy. Garment factories in Bangladesh provide employment to 40 percent of industrial workers. More than three-quarters of the \$7.8 billion of Bangladesh's export earnings comes from exporting garments. Despite falling prices, export volume has grown, and business is booming at present as the Bangladesh garment industry takes advantage of comparatively cheaper labour costs and World Trade Organization restrictions put on China, the world's largest Ready Made Garment (RMG) exporter. Bangladesh RMG imports to the US have increased 25% this year so far.[2]

In its negotiation of trade agreements with the US, the Bangladeshi garment industry is attempting to box clever in the arena of geo-politics; *"Dhaka raised the issue that most of these countries rely heavily on the export earnings of textiles and apparel which are subjected to some of the highest US tariffs, averaging 17 percent.*

*"Any debacle in the apparel industry would lead to massive unemployment of women, creating economic and social instability, and have other possible ramifications," the Ambassador said, conveying his country's apprehension to his American audience.*

*Elaborating on Bangladesh's achievement in this sector, Chowdhury pointed out that in a society where women empowerment is so deeply entrenched there is no scope for religious radicalism. "This must be sustained," he emphasised.*" (Bangladeshinfo.com, July 06) The implication being that lucrative duty-free access to the American market will encourage social conditions that lessen the possibility of a rise in Islamic fundamentalism. It is true that the so far limited emergence of fundamentalism in Dhaka has led to attacks on unions for their attempts to organise the predominantly female RMG workforce.

In the generally stagnant economy of Bangladesh, the ready made garment sector is the only significant economic force. This sector is entirely export oriented and is composed of over 5000 units - most working for international buyers, some owned by international companies. Most of the garment units are clustered in industrial areas and EPZs in and around Dhaka - Ghazipur, Savar, Ashulia, Mirpur, Tejgaon, Mohakhali, Uttara, Wari and Tongi etc. The textile and garments export constitute over 75% of a total of \$7.8 billion exports from Bangladesh.

Most of the garment workers have migrated from the poorest rural areas into the city slums. The slum population of Dhaka has doubled in the last 10 years. "More than 90 per cent of the slum dwellers have income below poverty line, which is Tk 5,000 a month a household. The dwellers are mostly transport workers, day labourers, garment workers, small vendors, hawkers and domestic helps..." (New Age.) It is this wider community that joined in the clashes and rioted with the garment workers.

The 2 million or so workers in the Bangladesh garment industry work for little more than starvation wages, under conditions closer to those endured by European workers 150-200 years ago. 90% are young girls and women from 12 years upwards: physical and sexual abuse in the workplace is common. Average rates of pay in the EPZs are \$20 a month, less than half the supposed official minimum wage, overtime is often compulsory and wages are sometimes withheld for months. Outside the EPZs, where over 80% of garment workers labour, conditions are worse. "Some of these garment workers earn as little as eight cents an hour, while the top wage for an experienced sewer is just 18 cents. ...

Helpers earn: 8 cents an hour; \$3.64 a week/ \$15.77 a month/ \$189.28 a year.

Senior Sewing Operators earn: 18 cents an hour/ \$8.40 a week/ \$36.40 a month/ \$436.80 a year."

(National Labour Committee, www.nlcnet.org, 2004)

*"The bourgeois media reports that the industry currently owes \$US300,000 in back pay, a staggering amount considering the miserly wages."* There are no guaranteed weekly days off, no holidays, no guaranteed maternity leave, no annual leave. Employment is also often insecure; workers change jobs frequently due to wage arrears, lay-offs, ill health or harassment from the bosses and their security guards.

The workplace is a highly dangerous place in this industry: in February and March this year 2 fires killed over 100 workers and injured hundreds more, provoking strikes. As is common, most exit doors were locked, increasing casualties greatly. Also in February, a multi-storey factory collapsed: originally built as a 2 storey building, then over-extended, 19 workers were killed and around 50 injured. Thousands of workers have died from employers' neglect of safety procedures.

\* \* \*

### ***Unions and workers***

Though there are 16 unions representing garment workers, according to the *Democratic Workers Party* "...the level of unionisation among workers is very low. Where unions are involved, they act more like extortionists, taking money from management to keep the employees in line while at the same time collecting dues from their members, with whom they have virtually no contact. Most of the unions have direct or indirect links with local and foreign NGOs, and receiving lucrative grants seems to be their main goal."

Most of the trade unions appear to be tools of one or other of the political parties, strikes being used more as vehicles for pursuing political goals against rival parties than improving workers' conditions. The Nation Garment Workers Federation[3] apparently is an exception to this, being a more grass-roots organisation, closer to an expression of workers' self-organisation emerging from their own struggles. It would be too easy and simplistic to apply critiques of modern western business unions to such an organisation. 11 years ago the NGWF was an organisation with 3 workers paid a basic garment workers wage operating out of a shed in a workers slum. Working in conditions more similar for workers in Europe a century or two ago, basic organization for defence and improvement of working conditions is a matter, sometimes, of whether one starves or not. With rapid large-scale proletarianisation of rural workers in many parts of Asia (China, India etc) struggles for unionisation are likely to follow. How institutionalised and bureaucratised organs like the NGWF might have become is unclear at present, and will be partly determined by their success as negotiators. One can predict that official recognition, with a greater budget and status to manage and protect, would accelerate that process. NGWF was at one time (though apparently no longer) in an alliance with the BGWUC , which has recently shown an eagerness to promise an obedient workforce to the bosses. [4]

Though organising trade unions was banned by employers in the EPZs, this is changing, as one of the concessions won by the revolt. This is anyway a convenient concession for the bosses; a Bill is being introduced into the US Senate which, if passed, would ban all imports produced in sweatshops. This is a form of US trade protectionism and corporate image management expressed as concern for workers' conditions. The Bill would penalise Bangladesh, Jordan etc and America's big rival China in, for example, the garment industry, by attempting to undercut their present advantage of cheaper labour costs.

"... the Greater Los Angeles area ... has surpassed the New York area as the center of the North American garment industry. Home to more than 1,000 manufacturers who employ an estimated 90,000 workers, most of them immigrant, the garment and related industries account for as much as 10 percent of Los Angeles' economy, according to "Sweatshop Slaves." Nearly one in five local employees today work in the garment industry, making it Los Angeles' leading manufacturing sector." (Review of *"Sweatshop Slaves: Asian Americans in the Garment Industry"*, Various, 2006.)

As well as the dire conditions of employment, the low level of unionism is one likely reason for the ferocity of the workers response. When it erupts, unmediated class war is generally conducted more brutally on both sides. The Bangladesh state finally realised this when it brought in union officials

to mediate and negotiate an end to the rebellion. In the long term, union representation is usually granted by the bosses as a necessary safety valve mechanism and tool of management for the stability of the production process.

\* \* \*

### ***Riot as struggle***

Some commentators, from the bourgeois media to the ultra-left, have considered the working class's use of riot as a sign of organisational weakness. On the contrary, we see their use of riot[5] and fire as brave and intelligent in a situation where they faced brutal repression by a determined body of employers and the armed forces of the state. Property damage combined with withdrawal of labour is a time-honoured tactic of proletarians. Rioting also opens up an opportunity for the wider working class community to become involved in the struggle and immediately spread the perspective beyond isolated sectional activity. When the cops and army invade workers' living areas it is anyway inevitable that the neighbourhood is drawn into the struggle. The extensive use of this tactic is also an inspiring example of effective collective self-organisation that, for the garment workers, has been far more successful than all previous struggles.

These events are part of a wider situation where, with so many workers in Bangladesh working at or below the level of a minimal wage necessary for survival, the class struggle more readily takes extra-ordinary forms. Thousands of primary school teachers have last week called off a hunger strike to the death in a struggle for higher wages. 15 said they would 'self-immolate' (set themselves on fire) if their demands were not met quickly. Negotiations are ongoing. (*New Age*, Dhaka.)[6]

\* \* \*

### ***The economics of exploitation***

The workers' revolt led to a sharp drop in share prices as international investors panicked at reports of a 'workers' insurrection' in the garment industry. At a meeting between the garment owners and the major international buyers (Gap, Walmart, Asda, Carrefour etc) on June 29th, they were criticised for their handling of labour relations. The bosses responded by saying that the agreed concessions such as wage rises would be passed on to the buyers and retailers abroad. One buyer's representative, claiming fake indignation at low wages in the industry, (which never captured their interest till now when it jeopardised smooth supply and cheap price) replied by asking; why had wages not risen in 12 years when prices had? (In the same period the cost of living for workers had doubled.) " *First Secretary and Chief Economic and Commercial Officer of the US Embassy in Bangladesh David W Renz said it was not enough to just increase the workers wages. "Improving the competitiveness is vital to compete in the global market."* " Meaning: claw back the wage increases by pushing for higher productivity.

The ruling class in Bangladesh should be worried by this expression of workers' power - a major revolt forcing major concessions in the only significant export industry. Some Western analysts are already classifying the country as 'a failing state' and it is rated as the most corrupt in the world (in whatever way the ruling class calculates such things). This is causing international concern at the potential destabilising influence on the region. "The geopolitical significance of the riots lies in the fact that they reveal the weakness of the Bangladeshi state. The failure of the government to contain the violence quickly and opting instead for half measures that satisfied neither side and did nothing to bring them to an agreement points to an implosion of governability and indicates that Bangladesh is drifting toward the status of a failed state. This has implications for the stability of the South Asian region." (pinr.com) The political system in Bangladesh is a vicious mess of instability and



regular political assassinations. There is no cohesion within the ruling class, only warring factions perpetuating an economically and politically vulnerable state.[7]

\* \* \*

For capital, the competition in the global RMG sector grows fiercer. Upward wage pressure, such as the Dhaka revolt expressed, will lead to demands for greater productivity to compete with those countries that have managed to keep the lid on wage demands. Competition for a bigger share of the market will cause market saturation and price drops. The possibility of new regulations outlawing or regulating sweatshop conditions by western buyer countries, as a form of protectionism and to ease concerns about corporate image, is another factor, as is import quota restriction by both the EU and US. The neo-liberal globalizing project has exported new forms of trade and production and, consequently, new forms of class struggle.

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## NOTES

[1] By the evidence of press photographs, the majority of demonstrators were male. There have been some pictures showing female demonstrators, but the insufficient evidence gives an impression that the activity on the streets is predominantly male, even though 90% of garment workers are female.

[2] "After the end of the Multi-Fiber Agreement at the beginning of 2005 and the changeover to the new World Trade Organization regime, it was feared that the Bangladesh's booming textile industry would suffer as it would lose business to countries like China and India. But fortunately for Bangladesh, so far this prediction has been proved wrong. In fact, the industry has continued to grow at a healthy rate of 20 percent. However, this does not indicate that the Bangladesh garment industry has become more competitive. The reality is that this increase has been largely due to restrictions imposed on China by the Western nations than to the ingenuity in Dhaka or Chittagong. The Chinese cannot be held back after 2008, which means a completely different picture might emerge after that.

Industry also faces various infrastructural problems. Due to shortage of power and diesel industries are not able to work to their full capacity. Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA) fears that production in RMG industry might fall by 50 percent and production cost might go up by about 25 percent due to the crises. Due to power shortage shipments are sent through air, thereby increasing its cost. Unfortunately the government has not taken any step to improve the situation. On the other hand, people have been shot dead for demanding regular supply of electricity." (*South Asia Analysis Group*.  
<http://www.saag.org/%5Cpapers19%5Cpaper1852.html>)

[3] For a description of the functioning of the NGWF in 1995 see <http://libcom.org/library/node/2141>. The NGWF membership estimates vary from 20,000 to 7-10,000. As workers frequently change jobs, there is a high rate of fluctuation. For a description by the ICG of class struggle in Bangladesh from the 1980s-90s see; <http://libcom.org/library/burma-struggles-riots-icg>

"The National Garment Workers Federation (NGWF) of Bangladesh has the largest and most sustained industrial union organizing drive in the world. Workers in hundreds of factories have

joined the NGWF. While they have no legal recognition, workers in all these factories strike and protest together. While workers in other countries try to organize shop by shop and judge their success with union contracts, when they lose a particular struggle they are left with no organization and no way to move forward. Long ago the NGWF of Bangladesh made a decision to organize industrially and maintain their organization and it's paid off. The NGWF maintains its own campaigns and calls for international solidarity without the help of NGOs and workers advocates." (*New People*, April 06, Pittsburgh, US.)

[4] The Bangladeshi Trotskyist *Democratic Workers Party* describes the BGWUC as a collection of "sham unions" (though whether this description is motivated as much by political rivalry as political clarity is uncertain).

*"On 3 May, garment workers and supporters staged a peaceful protest against a sudden wage cut in the Savar EPZ, 50 km north of the capital Dhaka. The management of Ring Shine called in the police, who attacked the 1500 strong gathering. One knitting operator, Rafiqul Islam, and one supporter, Mosharaf, were shot dead and 200 injured. Outraged demonstrators ransacked the factory in revenge. Six people were arrested, and a further 80 face charges of property damage.*

*In mid-May the Bangladesh Garments Workers Unity Council (BGWUC), comprising 8 such sham unions, secured an agreement under which Ring Shine agreed to pay the medical expenses of all injured workers, drop the charges filed against the demonstrators, pay back wages and follow the BEPZA rules regarding minimum wages and benefits, as well as compensation of about \$US4,000 to the families of the two men killed by police.*

***Under the agreement the BGWUC promised to undertake "the responsibility for peaceful operation of the factory and will ensure that the workers will not create any further problem in future in the factory".*** A rival union, the Garments Unity Forum, staged a demonstration condemning the deal as a sell-out but a few days later put its seal to the same agreement. Such 'compromises' are not in the interest of the workers, benefiting only the self-serving union bureaucrats and playing into the hands of the bosses.

*The Ring Shine incident is the most recent example of the volatile situation within the fortress-like compound at Savar, comprising 33,700 workers. In 1997, 15,000 of them went on strike in defiance of the ban, demanding trade union rights and job security." [Our emphasis.]*

[5] Those left and ultra-leftist 'marxists' who routinely dismiss rioting as a valid form of working class struggle (yet still slavishly take Marx's word on everything as gospel) ignore the fact that Marx himself participated enthusiastically in three 1855 riots of the London proletariat during mass demonstrations against proposals to restrict pub opening times. On successive Sundays working class demonstrators streamed out of Hyde Park into nearby rich areas such as Belgravia, rioting and assaulting the rich and their property. According to his companion, Liebknecht, Marx came close to being arrested. Marx later wrote, *"We saw it from beginning to end and do not think it an exaggeration to say the English revolution began in Hyde Park yesterday."* (Unfortunately, it was an exaggeration.) So despite what moralistic ultra-leftists and bourgeois alike may say, Marx clearly saw rioting as a radical weapon of the proletariat.

[6] <http://www.newagebd.com/front.html#3> - *New Age*, a Dhaka-based daily paper, has been the most detailed mainstream media source on the recent unrest.

[7] "The disadvantageous material and economic situation of Bangladesh is a cause of and is compounded by the lack of integration of its political class. Since its adoption of democratic institutions in 1990, after a chaotic succession of ineffective military governments, the country has

been riven by severe and persistent conflicts between its two major political parties -- the Awami League (A.L.) and the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (B.N.P.). Whichever party is out of power attempts to undermine the government through strikes and non-cooperation. The destructive rivalry between the A.L. and the B.N.P. is decidedly partisan rather than programmatic or ideological, although the A.L. is allied with left and secular parties and the B.N.P. with Islamic parties. [...]

The failure of the two factions in the pre-democratic period to reconcile with one another within democratic institutions has led to chronically ineffective governance, exacerbated by unwillingness to compromise and readiness to take direct action, with general strikes the preferred tactic. Most recently, on April 20, 2006, the A.L. called a general strike demanding Khaleda's resignation in the midst of a row over the constitution of the country's electoral commission. Until February 2006, the A.L. had been boycotting parliament after violent attacks on its rallies. [...]

The severity of Bangladesh's partisanship is epitomized by the failure of the putatively democratic parties to close ranks against extra-parliamentary tendencies. Instead, they both have added fuel to the fires, accusing one another of connivance with those tendencies." (pinr.com)

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<http://www.wsws.org/articles/2006/aug2006/lab0-a05.shtml>

### **Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia and the Pacific**

*The World Socialist Web Site invites workers and other readers to contribute to this regular feature.*

#### **Asia**

5 August 2006

### **Police attack Bangladesh apparel workers**

On July 29, Bangladesh police attacked a demonstration of around 6,000 apparel workers from eight garment factories owned by the Hachong Corporation. Despite the police assault, workers continued their march from Azampur until stopped by a police cordon near the Bismillah Shopping Complex.

The workers were demanding that Hachong reopen a factory it suddenly closed on July 18, reinstate the sacked workers and end its repressive measures against employees. They also condemned a police baton-charge on a demonstration in Uttara, Dhaka on July 28 which killed a pregnant worker. Around 50 protestors were injured during the assault and 20 workers arrested.

On July 31, workers from more than a dozen garments factories in Rokeya Sarani went on strike to demand a 3,000-taka minimum monthly wage (\$US43.38) and other benefits. Traffic stopped for two hours as workers marched from Shewrapara to Mirpur in Dhaka chanting slogans.

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<http://www.liberation.fr/actualite/economie/197623.FR.php>

### **Mondialisation**

#### **Textile : A l'autre bout de la chaîne**

Par Pierre PRAKASH

QUOTIDIEN : Mardi 8 août 2006 - 06:00

Dacca envoyé spécial



Atelier de couture au Bangladesh. REUTERS

**Ils sont des millions à travers le monde à être exploités, mais les premiers signes de craquement apparaissent. Reportage au Bangladesh après les émeutes de juin.**

Pour rencontrer les dizaines de milliers d'ouvriers du textile de la capitale bangladaise, il faut se rendre, la nuit, dans les bidonvilles insalubres des quartiers nord. Avant neuf, voire dix heures du soir, la plupart sont en effet à l'usine, comme en témoignent les centaines de façades illuminées à travers la ville des bâtiments pour beaucoup décatiés où les machines à coudre s'alignent par milliers, sur plusieurs étages. *«Je travaille au minimum douze heures par jour, sans jamais toucher toutes les heures supplémentaires»*, explique ainsi Salma, 18 ans, qui habite un labyrinthe de cabanon en briques. *«Que faire ? Si on proteste, on est viré, or ma famille ne peut pas se passer de mon salaire, et je ne trouverai jamais un autre emploi.»*

### **Les chaussures de Zidane**

Tel est le sort des 2 millions d'ouvriers bangladais employés dans la confection, véritable poumon économique puisqu'il représente les trois quarts des exportations (5 milliards d'euros en 2005). De Gap à H & M en passant par Wal-Mart, Zara ou encore Nike et Reebok, toutes les grandes marques occidentales se fournissent au Bangladesh, l'un des pays les plus pauvres du monde. En juin dernier, la révolte de ces ouvriers a rappelé, s'il en était besoin, les dures conditions de travail de ces *sweatshops* («ateliers de la sueur»). Et si c'est dans ce pays que la rébellion a été la plus massive, il ne se passe pas une semaine sans que des ONG ne signalent des éruptions de colère, de l'Indonésie au Nicaragua en passant par le Sri Lanka. Fin juillet, en Chine, à Dongguan, un millier d'ouvriers d'une usine de jouets travaillant notamment pour McDonald's ont violemment affronté les forces de l'ordre pour obtenir, selon China Labor Watch, ONG basée à New York, de meilleurs salaires. Tout cela au péril de leur emploi et parfois de leur vie.

Selon un rapport d'Oxfam, publié en mai, la plupart des ouvriers travaillant pour de grandes marques de sport ont été virés ou menacés de violences lorsqu'ils ont voulu mettre en place des organisations syndicales. Ce fut le cas chez Panarub, l'entreprise indonésienne où Adidas fait fabriquer les chaussures Predator, précisément celles que portaient Zinédine Zidane ou David Beckham pendant le Mondial. Aujourd'hui, Oxfam attend d'Adidas qu'il intervienne auprès de son fournisseur pour la réintégration des 33 leaders syndicaux. De fait, les multinationales sont de plus en plus sollicitées pour influencer sur les conditions de travail des *sweatshops*. Les audits sociaux qu'elles mènent désormais (lire page 4) y contribuent. Mais l'intérêt des marques ne rejoint pas toujours celui des populations qui sous-traitent : l'objectif n'est-il pas de faire fabriquer au meilleur coût ?

## **Attaques d'usines**

Le Bangladesh est un cas d'espèce. Le pays ne produit que peu de tissu, ce qui augmente les coûts de production puisqu'il faut l'importer. Mais le coût du travail y est si peu cher que l'opération reste rentable. A 930 takas (moins de 10,50 euros), le smic dans le textile n'a pas été réévalué depuis 1994. Or, entretemps, le coût de la vie a considérablement augmenté, si bien que les ouvriers, souvent des paysans venus en ville, vivent dans une misère absolue. *«Nous ne mangeons plus jamais de viande ou de poisson, juste des légumes et du riz»*, se lamente Shahina, devant les rangées de cabanes en tôle où s'entassent des milliers d'ouvriers de la zone industrielle de Sarvar, à une heure de la capitale.

Après s'être longtemps résignés, les ouvriers ont donc fini par se rebeller. Partie le 22 mai d'une entreprise de la région de Sarvar, la contestation s'est propagée comme une traînée de poudre jusqu'à la capitale, des milliers d'ouvriers enragés attaquant les usines à coups de pierres. Après une légère accalmie, de nouveaux troubles ont éclaté dans la zone franche de Dacca, début juin, obligeant toutes les unités à fermer près d'une semaine. Un mort, des centaines de blessés et des dizaines d'usines endommagées pour que les droits du travail les plus basiques s'appliquent enfin à ceux qui, de l'autre côté de la planète, fabriquent pour un salaire de misère les vêtements destinés à nos centres commerciaux...

Fin juin, un accord a été signé entre patronat, syndicats et gouvernement, pour que la législation du travail soit enfin respectée. Entré en vigueur début juillet, il ne concerne paradoxalement que des droits déjà prévus non seulement par la législation nationale, mais aussi par diverses conventions du Bureau international du travail que Dacca a ratifiées. A l'exception de quelques grosses entreprises, ils n'ont jamais été appliqués.

L'an dernier, des centaines d'employés sont morts dans des incendies d'usine, parfois parce qu'il n'y avait pas d'issue de secours, ou parce qu'ils étaient enfermés à l'intérieur.

## **«Comme des esclaves»**

Sous la pression de leurs clients occidentaux, certaines entreprises traitent mieux leurs employés. Mais, dans la grande majorité des cas, le congé hebdomadaire n'existe toujours pas, le congé maternité non plus, et ceux qui tentent de se syndiquer sont systématiquement renvoyés. Les maltraitances verbales, voire physiques, sont courantes problème qui, selon les ouvriers, est moins lié aux propriétaires qu'au staff intermédiaire. *«Ils sont traités comme des esclaves*, accuse Abu Hussein, de l'Alliance nationale pour la protection des ouvriers et de l'industrie du vêtement. *Parce que c'est une industrie jeune, et que nous avons affaire à une première génération d'entrepreneurs qui n'a aucune conscience sociale. Et parce que les ouvriers sont eux aussi une première génération et n'ont aucune conscience de leurs droits.»* Sans compter que 80 % des effectifs sont des femmes.

## **«Nous ne savions pas»**

*«Les clients ne s'intéressent qu'aux prix*, accuse Nazma Akter, présidente du SGSF, l'un des nombreux syndicats du secteur. *Et le gouvernement a toujours fermé les yeux, d'une part parce que les exportations de vêtements représentent la première source de devises étrangères, et d'autre part parce que beaucoup de nos politiques sont directement liés à ce secteur.»* *«Le textile relève du secteur privé, nous ne savions pas ce qui se passait dans les usines avant les émeutes»*, tente d'argumenter le ministre du Commerce, Hafiz Uddin Ahmad, tout en concédant que les salaires actuels sont *«bien trop bas»*.

Une commission tripartite doit ainsi rehausser d'ici à la fin du mois le salaire minimum. Les syndicats réclament qu'il soit fixé à 3 000 takas (33,60 euros) par mois, mais les patrons affirment déjà que c'est *«impossible»*. *«Si nous acceptons ne serait-ce que 2 000 takas (22,50 euros), la moitié des usines fermeront leurs portes»*, affirme ainsi Tipu Munshi, président de l'Association des fabricants et exportateurs de vêtements du Bangladesh, qui fédère quelque 3 000 entreprises du secteur. *«Et les clients devront accepter qu'elle soit en partie répercutée sur les prix, sinon nous ne*

*survivrons pas.*» Selon lui, les salaires représentent en effet «50 à 60 %» du coût de production. Selon des estimations indépendantes, il se situerait en fait entre 5 et 10 %.

### **«Ils sont moins agressifs»**

Habitués aux manipulations, les syndicats restent toutefois dans l'expectative avant de crier victoire au sujet de la mise en place des réformes, notamment celle touchant à l'autorisation de la présence syndicale dans les usines. Des accords similaires ont en effet déjà été signés par le passé sans être honorés. *«La différence, cette fois-ci, est que la pression n'est pas venue des syndicats, mais des ouvriers eux-mêmes»*, souligne Nazma Akter.

La violence des émeutes semble en effet avoir sorti patrons et autorités de leur torpeur. A Dacca comme dans la zone industrielle de Sarvar, la plupart des ouvriers affirment que depuis, l'attitude du management a changé. *«Ils sont moins agressifs, les heures supplémentaires sont payées normalement et nous avons maintenant droit à un jour de congé par semaine»*, témoigne ainsi Priya, couturière de 26 ans, qui n'en revient toujours pas d'être payée pour une journée non travaillée.

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## **Mondialisation**

### **Des syndicats inefficaces et désunis**

Par Pierre PRAKASH

QUOTIDIEN : Mardi 8 août 2006 - 06:00

Si les ouvriers bangladais du textile sont si mal lotis, c'est certes en raison des abus du patronat, mais aussi, en bonne partie, parce que les syndicats qui sont censés les représenter sont d'une inefficacité redoutable conséquence de l'affiliation aux partis politiques, mais aussi de l'ambition personnelle des leaders. Près d'une quarantaine d'organisations différentes se disputent en effet la représentation de ce secteur fort de 2 millions d'employés. Résultat : les leaders passent plus de temps à se battre entre eux plutôt que pour l'intérêt des ouvriers. Bizarrement, la grande majorité des syndicalistes ne sont pas issus de l'industrie concernée et n'ont donc jamais travaillé dans une usine. A leur décharge, ce manque de liens avec la base tient aussi au fait que les leaders syndicaux ne sont pas tolérés dans les usines et travaillent donc exclusivement de l'extérieur. Ce qui n'excuse pas le fait qu'un bon nombre d'entre eux sont corrompus, situation qui, au-delà du problème éthique, facilite grandement le jeu des organisations patronales, qui, elles, sont par contre très soudées.

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## **Mondialisation**

### **Des sous-traitants sous surveillance**

#### **En Inde, les multinationales multiplient les audits sociaux sur les conditions de travail.**

Par Pierre PRAKASH

QUOTIDIEN : Mardi 8 août 2006 - 06:00

New Delhi de notre correspondant

Au-delà des discours sur l'éthique, comment les marques occidentales s'y prennent-elles pour vérifier ce qui se passe chez leurs fournisseurs à l'autre bout du monde ? En Inde, par exemple ? Comment s'assurer que les employés n'y sont pas exploités, l'environnement saccagé ? Depuis quelques années, la plupart des marques de la grande distribution multiplient les «audits sociaux»,

des inspections plus ou moins régulières qui visent à s'assurer que leurs sous-traitants respectent, au minimum, les conventions du Bureau international du travail. *« Désormais, la plupart de nos clients réclament ces audits, soit par réelle inquiétude, soit par peur d'être montrés du doigt »*, affirme Aristide Samuel de Find Agencies, centrale d'achat basée à New Delhi qui fournit des clients comme les Galeries Lafayette, Casino ou la Blanche Porte. Face à la demande, l'entreprise a d'ailleurs monté sa cellule d'inspection.

**Présence de mineurs.** Dans la majorité des cas, les multinationales s'en remettent cependant à un intermédiaire spécialisé. *« Nous sommes un parti tiers, sans intérêt d'un côté ni de l'autre »*, explique Claude Lanouhe, directeur régional du groupe SGS, numéro 1 mondial de la certification, qui effectue en Inde les audits sociaux de *« plus d'une centaine d'entreprises étrangères. Notre expertise mondiale fait de nous une valeur sûre, et nous avons les capacités de travailler partout dans la langue locale, ce que le client, lui, ne peut pas faire »*. *« Nous faisons en moyenne 30 à 40 audits sociaux par mois »*, précise Mayank Kaushik, qui dirige l'équipe d'une vingtaine d'inspecteurs formés à l'étranger. *Les critères pour chaque inspection varient, car il y a différentes normes selon les pays, les secteurs, voire les clients. »* SGS gère notamment les inspections des membres de la Fédération des entreprises du commerce et de la distribution, qui regroupe tous les grands noms du secteur, lesquels ont créé une norme spécifique, l'Initiative clause sociale (ICS).

Présence de mineurs, travail forcé, hygiène et sécurité ou encore salaire, horaires de travail et droits syndicaux, tout est passé au crible par les employés de SGS, qui ont l'autorisation de discuter en aparté avec les ouvriers. Afin de les mettre en confiance, les auditeurs ont pour consigne de ne pas venir trop bien habillés, et la présence d'une inspectrice est obligatoire quand l'usine emploie du personnel féminin. En cas d'entorse, SGS suggère un plan d'action à l'entreprise, qui bénéficie d'un délai pour obtempérer.

Pour les clients, ce procédé permet d'avoir la conscience tranquille. *« 100 % de nos usines sont inspectées, au maximum tous les deux ans »*, explique Alexis de Villepin, directeur en Inde de la filiale de Carrefour chargée de l'approvisionnement. *« Nous n'avons pas trop de mauvaises surprises, car la majorité de nos 70 fournisseurs indiens travaillent pour d'autres marques internationales, et se sont donc déjà alignés sur des normes proches de l'ICS »*, poursuit-il.

Contrairement à d'autres normes, les inspections ICS sont toutefois annoncées à l'avance, ce qui pourrait laisser le temps à l'usine de faire place nette. *« Ce n'est pas qu'une inspection visuelle, nous épluchons les fichiers de l'entreprise et parlons directement avec les ouvriers. Il est très difficile de nous cacher quoi que ce soit »*, assure Mayank Kaushik.

Reste cependant les risques de corruption. Comment être sûr qu'un inspecteur indien, payé entre 300 et 400 euros par mois, ne va pas accepter un pot-de-vin pour fermer les yeux sur telle ou telle pratique illégale ? *« C'est effectivement un risque »*, concède Claude Lanouhe. *Il nous est déjà arrivé de nous séparer d'un employé pour de tels motifs. Mais nous avons aujourd'hui mis en place un maillage très difficile à percer. »* A l'embauche, les inspecteurs commencent ainsi par signer un «code d'intégrité», tandis que la rotation évite qu'ils ne développent des relations de copinage. Ils font aussi l'objet d'audits internes, voire d'inspections surprises pendant qu'ils sont eux-mêmes en train de visiter une usine.

**Heures supplémentaires.** Si le système n'est pas efficace à 100 %, son utilité est prouvée. Mais tous les secteurs ne font pas les mêmes efforts. Dans l'habillement, l'une des plus importantes exportations indiennes, la mobilisation est loin d'être totale. *« Il y a eu un léger réveil il y a deux ans, mais aujourd'hui ça se rendort »*, affirme Mylène Wilks de Partners Agency, un agent textile qui gère les productions indiennes de marques européennes telles que Mango, Promod ou Okaidi. *« A l'exception des marques pour enfants, qui sont plus impliquées, la grande majorité des clients ne posent aucune question sur les conditions de travail chez leurs fournisseurs »*, ajoute un autre agent textile sous couvert d'anonymat. Parfois parce que ces marques inspectent elles-mêmes les usines avec l'inconvénient de ne pas pouvoir interroger les ouvriers directement, barrière linguistique oblige, parfois parce qu'elles s'en remettent à un tiers comme SGS, mais aussi, parfois, parce

qu'elles ne s'en soucient pas. *«Certains clients, notamment les plus petits, se fichent des audits sociaux, ils ne s'intéressent qu'aux prix, à la qualité, et aux délais de livraison»*, avoue ainsi Aristide Samuel. Et *«ceux qui font des efforts ne sont pas pour autant prêts à payer les produits plus cher, ajoute Mylène Wilks. D'ailleurs, un fournisseur qui joue le jeu des audits sociaux n'est pas sûr de remporter la commande pour autant. Parfois, le client opte au final pour le fournisseur le moins cher, sans tenir compte des efforts faits par un autre»*.

L'utilité des audits sociaux est cependant incontestable. En Inde, la plupart des violations ne concernent plus que les heures supplémentaires excessives ou pas assez payées et des problèmes mineurs d'hygiène, de sécurité ou de formation. Les violations les plus graves, comme le travail des enfants ou le travail forcé, ont été en grande partie éradiquées. Du moins dans les usines qui travaillent pour l'export.