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Bangladeshi garment workers riot over wages

Police have fired tear gas and rubber bullets on thousands of textile workers in Bangladesh's capital as a demonstration for better wages turned into a riot.

Police chief SM Naimur Rahman said least 50 people were injured as police tried to disperse about 3,000 workers.

They were demonstrating over demands for better wages and a new work timetable for the Muslim holy fasting month of Ramadan.

Mr Rahman says workers have smashed cars and buses and vandalised shops in markets in Dhaka's northern residential district of Uttara.

At least 50 people, including some police officers, were injured in clashes between that lasted two hours.

Hundreds of cars and buses were left stranded along a major national highway.

Bangladesh has been rocked since May by a series of protests over low wages in the growing textile sector.

At least 16 factories have been torched and hundreds ransacked by tens of thousands of rioting workers.

Minimum wage offered

Early this month, unions rejected a minimum monthly wage of 1,604 taka (\$A33) announced by the government's National Wage Commission and demanded at least 2,000 taka (\$A41) per month.

Employers have said even a 1,604 taka minimum wage would have a "devastating" impact on the industry by making it less competitive on world markets.

Impoverished Bangladesh, which has some 4,200 garment factories, relies on the industry for more than three quarters of its \$A14 billion in export earnings.

More than two million workers, 85 per cent of whom are women, work in the sector, which is notorious for poor salaries and shabby safety standards.

But business has boomed since the end of global textile quotas last year.

Garment exports in the last financial year alone grew by more than 24 per cent.

AFP

<http://www.newagebd.com/2006/oct/01/front.html#1>

Garment workers clash with law men at Uttara

More than 100 injured, five factories, 20 vehicles vandalised

Staff Correspondent

At least 100 people were injured, and five factories and 20 vehicles damaged as thousands of garment workers fought with the law enforcers and the people of the factory owners at Uttara in Dhaka on Saturday.



The employees of a factory have continued their agitation to demand disbursement of their increased salaries, overtime bills and other payments in arrears.

The workers of a factory with the help of the workers of other factories blocked up the Dhaka–Mymensingh Highway, suspending traffic for about four hours, and damaged shopping malls, vehicles and factories.

Witnesses said the garment of the Syntex Knitwear Limited, housed on the fourth and fifth floors of the seven-storey Kushal Centre at Uttara, gathered in front of the factory at about 7:30am to join work.

The workers came to know the authorities had closed the factory for an indefinite period. They also found one of their fellows, Abu Bakar, bloodstained from torture by goons hired by the owners.

The injured Abu Bakar said some armed, hired goons loyal to the management dragged him

inside the factory and beat him up when he went there to join work in the morning.

The workers said the hired goons beat up another worker, Abdur Rahim, on Thursday and he is now being treated in Dhaka Medical College Hospital.

Enraged at this, hundreds of workers took to the streets and went on the rampage, by pelting stones at the factory building.

‘The authorities of the factory without any notice fired four of our colleagues on September 4 as we went out on demonstrations under their leadership to demand disbursement of our increased salaries, overtime bills and other payments in arrears,’ Khaleq, a knitting operator of the factory, told New Age.

‘As we began work abstention and went out on demonstrations demanding reinstatement of the four sacked workers on September 7, the authorities called in the police and threatened us,’ he said.

Kalpana Akhter, another worker, said ‘The authorities, instead of fulfilling our demands, planned to repress us with the help of hired goons, who critically injured one of our fellows, Ripon, on Thursday.’

As the goons continuously assaulted some workers of the factory, violence was triggered off in the lining area of the Kushal Shopping Mall at around 8:00am.

The workers began damaging and vandalising shops, offices, and others garment factories housed in the building.

The Uttara and Airport police immediately went to the spot, but failed to tackle the situation. The police barricade the stretch from the airport crossing to the Abdullahpur crossing, leaving vehicles stranded on a stretch of about four kilometres on both ends of the road for more than four hours.

The situation worsened when workers from different factories in the lining area joined hands with the agitators at around 10:15am.

The workers began vandalising Laxma Knitwear, Pallab Garments, Boutique Design, SKS Industry, NAZ Fashion and others establishments in the area.

Riot police, led by the Uttara zone deputy commissioner Monir Hossain, went to the spot and charged at the workers with truncheons to tackle the situation, in which about 60 workers were injured.

The workers, enraged at police action, began pelting stones at the law men and damaging vehicles stranded on the road, said a resident, adding the police fired 35 rounds of rubber bullet and lobbed 45 rounds of teargas canisters to disperse the workers.

Witnesses said the workers chased the policemen and damaged more than 20 vehicles, including two police vans parked in front of the Uttara police station.

At one stage, the police, along with the hired goons with sticks, clashed with the workers on the alleys in the area, in which 40, including five policemen, were injured.

The injured five policemen were admitted to Rajarbagh Police Hospital; the remained were treated in local clinics.

The Rapid Action Battalion members went to the spot at around 11:45am and tackled the situation.

Monir Hossain told New Age, ‘The incident took place over the termination of the job of four workers. The situation is now under control.’

He said he would not make any comments on the alleged manhandling of the workers by the police with the help of the hired goons without any investigation.

Tension kept mounting in the factory. Three platoons of law enforcers, along with the battalion personnel, were deployed in and around the factory to avert further trouble.

<http://www.thedailystar.net/2006/10/01/d6100101033.htm>

Committed to PEOPLE'S RIGHT TO KNOW

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RMG workers ransack Uttara police station

Damage over 50 vehicles for better pay

Staff Correspondent

At least 50 people including 10 policemen and three journalists were injured during a series of clashes between the law enforcers and garment workers at Uttara in the capital yesterday when the workers went on a rampage demanding wage increase, bonus and arrears.

The workers attacked Uttara Police Station, damaged around a dozen vehicles including seven police vans parked inside and a makeshift police camp. Police fired several rounds of rubber bullet and 35 teargas canisters to disperse the marauding garment workers.

During the four and a half hours demonstration, the aggrieved workers vandalised two markets, as many banks, wayside restaurants and about 50 vehicles on the Dhaka-Mymensingh highway. Traffic remained halted for four hours as the vandalism on the busy highway and adjacent shops and markets continued till 12:15pm when police and Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) managed to bring the situation under control. Law enforcers arrested 16 demonstrators.

A few hundred workers of Syntax Sweater Factory first gathered in front of the factory at around 8:00am when they learnt that goons hired by the factory authorities beat up three of their colleagues for agitating for higher wage, bonus and arrears, witnesses said.

Joined soon by their other colleagues, they took to the highway and pelted Syntax factory with stones.

As police rushed there to disperse the demonstrators, hundreds of workers from adjacent garment factories -- Hachong, SKS Fashion, Pallab, Boutique, Naz, Kating, Laxma, SD, Bengal and STR -- joined them to block the highway at Azampur and Jasimuddin Road.

The demonstrators attacked different shops on the ground, first and second floors of Kushol Centre at Azampur, witnesses said, adding that they tried to loot Islami Bank and Gharaa Restaurant in the shopping mall. They also broke the glasses of the building.

Another group tried to break into Social Investment Bank and Khazana Restaurant at Latif Emporium market in Sector-3.

After many more garment workers appeared there, policemen charged batons to clear the highway. The workers hurled brickbats and stones at the police.

At around 9:30am, a few thousand agitators chased the policemen towards Uttara Police Station and broke the windowpanes of the police station building with stones.

They also vandalised seven police vans and five other vehicles parked inside the police station. Policemen in riot gear fired about 35 tear gas canisters and rubber bullets to scare away the demonstrators.

Many demonstrators as well as pedestrians were seen bleeding from police action and stone throwing.

Deputy Commissioner of Police Monir Hossain, Assistant Deputy Commissioner Faiz Ahmed, Assistant Commissioner (AC) Saleh Ahmed, AC Shafiq, Inspector Rafiqul Alam, reporter of the New Nation Ibrahim Sarker, BDNEWS reporter Monir Hossain and Desh Bangla photojournalist Mahmudur Rahman were among the 50 who were injured during the clashes.

The demonstrators vandalised two double-decker Volvo buses and about 50 other vehicles logged on the highway.

As a large number of vehicles snarled up on the highway from Tongi to Progati Sarani at Kuril Bishwa Road, thousands of commuters had to walk a few kilometres.

At round 12:15pm, police and Rab members chased away the demonstrators to clear the highway and traffic movement resumed shortly afterwards.

The authorities do not regularly pay salary, a worker of Syntax Sweater Factory told reporters.

“For the last few months, we have demanded stopping employees' termination for trivial reasons, increasing our salary to Tk 3,000, sick leave and timely payment of our wage and for bonus,” he added.

“The authorities are not at all serious about our demands,” said another garment worker.

Many agitators alleged that the factory owners hired goons to torture workers and foil their demonstration for realising demands.

Denying the allegation, owner of Syntax Sweater Factory Omar Hanif Chowdhury said yesterday's vandalism was a result of 'quarrel' between two groups of knitting section employees at his factory two days ago. “We are trying to settle the quarrel. If we fail, we will have to shut down the factory,” he told reporters.

RAMPURA

Workers of Pioneer Garment Factory demanding wage increase, bonus and arrears blocked the Progati Sarani at Rampura and vandalised five vehicles yesterday morning.

The agitators withdrew the blockade after police assured them of fulfilling their demands.

GAZIPUR

Garment workers of Machhihata Sweater Factory at Panishail, who have been agitating for the last few days for wage hike, weekly holiday and removal of the factory AGM, brought out a procession and hurled stones at the factory when they saw their factory closed yesterday morning, reports our correspondent.

Later police and Rab brought the situation under control.

The authorities hung the closure notice yesterday in the face of workers' movement, sources said.

Meantime, workers of Hachong BD Limited at Kaliakoir brought out a procession yesterday morning to protest termination of five colleagues.

As they started throwing brickbats and broke windowpanes, police and Rab rushed there and pacified them by giving assurance of mediation.

<http://libcom.org/news/situation-normal-bangladesh-in-turmoil-02102006>

Situation normal - Bangladesh in turmoil

Submitted by Ret Marut on Mon, 02/10/2006 - 01:09.



The riots in Dhaka from Wednesday evening continuing through Thursday morning (see earlier report) protesting frequent electric power cuts, spread to various other areas of Bangladesh and continued on Friday.

Roads were blocked, thousands of demonstrators fought police, also attacked offices and property of the national electricity supplier. Two days later the Prime Minister sacked her 'Minister for State Power'. (No, not a character from Orwell's '1984'.) The previous Energy Minister was sacked in May for admitting publicly that it would take at least 3 years to ease the shortage in supplies and that the crisis could escalate over the next 2 years. The Prime Minister has also instructed her Energy Ministry to scrap the deal with British company Asia Energy to develop an opencast coal mine in Phulbari. This proposed project met with massive violent opposition recently (see earlier

report). With an general election due in the New Year, energy supply has become a hot political issue.

In many areas of the Dhaka and elsewhere, security forces were overwhelmed by sheer numbers of demonstrators and their improvised road blocks;

"In eastern Dhaka, protesters used burning logs to blockade the main highway connecting the capital with the southeast port city of Chittagong.

"Thousands of people put timber logs on (the) road. There is complete anarchy there and the police cannot even get there to tackle the situation,"" said a police officer.

The World Bank recently estimated that Bangladesh needs 10 billion dollars in investment over the next 10 years to fix average daily power shortfalls of 700 to 800 megawatts. Total daily demand is estimated at around 4,900 megawatts, compared with a supply of only 3,065 megawatts. Only 25 percent of the country's 140 million population has access to electricity. Many rural areas have power for only four hours a day, if at all.

The situation in Bangladesh is in stark contrast to the more rapidly developing 'Asian Tiger' economies such as China and South Korea. The country cannot even provide itself with adequate power supplies for domestic and industrial needs, so hampering any sustained economic expansion. Unlike the more successful Asian economies, Bangladesh lacks necessary infrastructure, skills and education, natural resources and, importantly, political stability to develop such an infrastructure and attract greater investment.

New garment struggles:

Yesterday (Saturday 1st Oct) at least 100 people were injured, and five factories and 20 vehicles damaged as thousands of garment workers fought with cops and factory security guards at Uttara in Dhaka. Workers arrived to find that they had been locked out by management and that two of their fellow workers had been beaten up by security thugs.

The workers called out workforces of other factories and together they blocked the Dhaka–Mymensingh Highway, suspending traffic for about four hours; they also damaged shopping malls and vehicles. As more workplaces joined them, more factories were attacked. As riot police arrived and baton charged, workers responded with volleys of stones and attacked vehicles. Police fired tear gas and rubber bullets - the workers then chased police and attacked their vans. The clashes continued for 4 hours during which 100 workers and 5 cops were injured.

It was announced last week by garment worker unions that there would be a renewed agitation. Unions, bosses and government have failed to agree on setting a minimum wage, agreed wage rises have not been paid, back pay is still owed and bosses are using lock outs to try and starve the workers into coming back to work under worse terms and conditions. It is unclear how much leadership or influence the unions have over garment workers struggles beyond representing workers at negotiating tables with bosses: though reports suggest that much of the constant workers' agitations in the workplace and on the street are self-organised and beyond any bureaucratic control.

<http://www.thedailystar.net/2006/10/11/d6101101011.htm>

Front Page

RMG workers rampage again for higher pay

Major roads blocked for hours; around 100 factories ransacked; shopping malls looted

Staff Correspondent

Thousands of garment workers staged violent demonstrations in Dhaka and Gazipur yesterday,

barricading major thoroughfares in Mirpur and Uttara for around four hours and vandalising around 100 apparel-manufacturing units and looting shopping complexes.

Law-enforcers were very late to show up in the site of destruction, allowing the workers to run amok practically without any resistance. When a few policemen arrived at last, the demonstrators locked in fierce clashes with them at Azampur in Uttara and Shewrapara in Mirpur, leaving over 100 people including 15 policemen injured.

They beat up the officer-in-charge (OC) of Uttara Police Station and snatched his pistol and walkie-talkie. The police could not recover those as of 7:00pm yesterday.

A group of agitating garment workers set fire to apparel at the Woodland garment factory in Mirpur while another group burned four vehicles at Azampur bus stand in Uttara. Around 100 vehicles were set on fire in different areas of Mirpur and Uttara.

Reports of demonstrations also came from Hatirpool, Shyamoli and Mohammadpur in the city and Abdullahpur and Tongi industrial area in Gazipur.

Police sources said the number of policemen was very small at the spots while the Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) present also remained almost inactive.

Despite a countrywide half-day strike called by Garments Sramik Sangram Parishad, an alliance of 11 garment workers' associations, demanding Tk 3,000 as minimum wage, many owners opened their factories at different places in the capital yesterday morning.

The clashes between the law enforcers and the agitating workers ensued as the latter attacked the industrial units to force the management to shut down.

However, many of the stick and iron rod yielding garment workers agitating in Mirpur could not clearly say why they were agitating. Some of them said they are protesting against the non-payment of their last month's salary. They said the delay was only to dodge the payment of the bonus.

The garment workers threw stones at the doors and window glasses of all garment factories and a few shopping malls on both sides of Rokeya Sarani from Mirpur-12 to Shewrapara, and of the Dhaka-Mymensingh Highway in Uttara.

Witnesses said thousands of agitators took to the streets around 8:30am blocking around the three-kilometre road from Azampur to Abdullahpur while several thousand others barricaded the main streets from Mirpur-12 to Taltola on Rokeya Sarani.

Commuters including officials and students found it difficult to reach their destinations due to the barricades. Vehicles remained stranded in long queues on the Dhaka-Mymensingh Highway and Rokeya Sarani.

UTTARA

More than one thousand workers took out a procession in Uttara around 8:00am. At one stage, they attacked the Maskat Plaza and started looting goods. As police came forward to disperse the garment workers and outsiders, the workers started throwing stones at the law enforcers and chased them to the Uttara Police Station.

Another group started vandalising vehicles at Abdullahpur. They also pelted brickbats and attacked with sticks as around 30 policemen tried to disperse them.

The policemen took shelter at a CNG filling station in the area, but the workers vandalised it and beat up the policemen.

When several severely injured policemen were being taken to Dhaka Medical College and Hospital in an ambulance, the workers attacked the ambulance and beat up the policemen again.

Roads in Uttara were opened for traffic around 1:00pm.

Mirpur

In Mirpur, security personnel employed by Mollah Market at Mirpur-12 fired four or five blank shots from their licensed shotguns when the protesters tried to attack the market that housed several garments factories.

Police clashed with the agitating workers at Shewrapara from 10:30am to 12:00 noon as the workers tried to attack some garment factories after the staff of a factory beat up two workers.

Police lobbed several teargas shells to disperse the workers.

Thousands of workers damaged barbed wires and uprooted fences of the city's road divider beautification scheme and went wild on the streets with truncheons in their hands," said witnesses.

A group of striking workers also attacked the double-decker bus depot at Mirpur 12 at about 9:30am following information that the depot employees injured one of their fellow workers.

The government-appointed tripartite National Minimum Wage Board last Thursday formulated a proposal unanimously fixing the minimum wage for the workers of the export-oriented garment industry at Tk 1662.50 per month, widening the difference between the negotiating owners and workers.

However, some workers' organisations demanding Tk 3,000 per month as minimum wage called the strike in a delayed sequel to an unprecedented labour revolt in the export oriented industry that flared up from Dhaka Export Processing Zone and engulfed the industrial belts in and around the capital in May-June this year.

A number of garment factory owners said yesterday's violence is a conspiracy by a vested quarter to destroy the export-oriented garments industries of Bangladesh.

Meanwhile, different political and workers' organisations condemned police atrocities on garment workers in different areas in the capital yesterday during the strike called by Garments Sramik Sangram Parishad.

The organisations that observed yesterday's strike are Garment Workers Unity Forum, Sramik Karmachari Sangram Parishad, Garments Sramik Sangram Parishad, Bangladesh National Garments Workers Employees League, Jago Bangladesh Garments Sramik Federation, Bangladesher Workers Party and five left leaning parties.

Savar

At least 50 garment workers were injured yesterday and 20 arrested as law enforcers and the agitating garment workers clashed at Savar and Ashulia, reports our JU correspondent.

The workers were demonstrating to enforce a strike called to protest the newly fixed minimum wage for RMG workers. Their demand includes Tk 3,000 as minimum wage.

More than 1,500 workers from different garment factories blockaded the Dhaka-Aricha and Nabinagar-Kaliakoir highways in the morning as part of the strike and vandalised about 30 to 35 vehicles.

Both highways remained snapped for about two hours while around a dozen of garment factories in the area came under attack of the protesters.

As the police intercepted the procession and clubbed the demonstrators, the workers vandalised numbers of factories nearby including Han Apparels Ltd and Cannon Apparels Ltd. They also vandalised a microbus belonging to the law enforcers.

It took around two hours for the law enforcers to have the situation under control. The clash left at least 30 workers injured.

"The workers have been arrested for blockading the highway, vandalising vehicles and creating disorder in normal life. Preparation is underway to file a case," said Akhtaruzzaman, officer in charge of Savar Police Station.

No incidence of violence was reported yesterday in Dhaka Export Processing Zone area.

Meanwhile, criminals vandalised a sweater factory at Durgapur in Ashulia and injured five people yesterday as the factory owner refused to pay Tk 5 lakh as toll.

<http://www.thedailystar.net/2006/10/11/d6101101139.htm>

BGMEA threatens to close down factories

Demands punishment of attackers

Staff Correspondent

Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA) yesterday threatened to close down their factories for an indefinite period if the government failed to punish the people responsible for ransacking different factories in the capital yesterday within 48 hours.

BGMEA President SM Fazlul Hoque gave the ultimatum at a hurriedly called press conference at the association's office yesterday evening after workers rampaged through around 100 factories in Dhaka and Gazipur.

He also demanded immediate deployment of law enforcement agencies including Rapid Action Battalion (Rab), Bangladesh Rifles and if necessary, the army, to bring the situation under control.

Hoque also named four persons -- Mosharaff Hossain Mishu, Advocate Mahbubur Rahman Ismail, Bahrane Sultan and Master Moklesur Rahman and termed them as conspirators saying that they led the destruction in collaboration with foreign agencies.

These people along with some others in three to four minibuses went to different factories and urged the workers to come out for demonstrations and in some areas, they forcibly brought out the workers for carrying out the destruction, the BGMEA president alleged.

"The government should investigate where they get the funds and who guide them to destruction," Hoque said adding "they are trying to destroy the faith of buyers to shift the \$8 billion export industry elsewhere from Bangladesh."

At least seven factories were vandalised completely with some 100 factories partially damaged at Mirpur, Pallabi, Shamoli, Kafrul and Uttara, he said adding that the miscreants also looted machinery and documents from these factories.

Hoque also questioned about the role of the law enforcers saying that at some areas, they did nothing but to keep watching the daylong destruction. He, however, lauded their activities at Gazipur, Savar, Naraynganj, Jirabo, Malibagh and Old Dhaka where the angry workers could not stage any destruction.

<http://www.newagebd.com/2006/oct/11/front.html#1>

RMG workers run amok in city

Over 100 injured, seven factories and 50 vehicles damaged

Arif Newaz Farazi

More than 100 people were injured and seven garments factories, three shopping malls and 50 vehicles were damaged and vandalised as thousands of striking garment workers fought pitched battles with the police and hired thugs of the factory owners in and outside the capital on Tuesday.

The angry workers put up barricades on thoroughfares in the city, blocking traffic movement, and set ablaze two vehicles during the four-hour clash.

The workers split into small groups, clashed with law enforcers and stormed into different garments factories and shopping malls and vandalised them in front of the police.

According to the witnesses, thousands of garment workers, rejecting the minimum wage scale, enforced a strike and brought out a procession from Mirpur-1 and marched towards Shewrapara through Mirpur-10 at around 9:00am. Some unruly workers attacked the BRTC bus depot and damaged a double-decker bus at Mirpur-12.

They held a rally at Shewrapara and demanded minimum wage of Tk 3,000, and chanted slogans against the leaders who, they alleged, had hatched a conspiracy against them.

When some workers informed the demonstrators that some hired goons had confined two workers inside the SQ Sweater factory located in Shewpara, they rushed there and called the workers to join them.

After some hired thugs of the owners threw stones and brickbats on the agitators from the roof of the factory, the workers went on the rampage, damaging SQ Sweater, Wood Tex Apparels, Outright Industry, JK Fashion, Moni Sweater, Ying Ming Garments and Speedwell Fashion. They also damaged and looted the Haji Ashraf Ali Super Market located on the ground-floor of the building that houses the SQ Sweater factory.

Police lathi-charged them and fired 35 rounds of teargas shells on the unruly workers to disperse them. About 20 of the agitators were injured.

Soon after the incident, the workers again tried to march towards Mirpur-10 but the police intercepted them, and the agitators again went on the rampage and clashed with the law enforcers.

When the police lathi-charged them indiscriminately, the demonstrators pelted them with stones and brickbats. They also damaged more than 20 vehicles stranded on the Rokeya Sarani Road.

A huge contingent of police and members of the Rapid Action Battalion rushed to the spot and brought the situation under control at around 12:30pm.

In Uttara, thousands of agitating workers took control of the Airport road and clashed with law



enforcers from the morning, turning the Abdullahpur to Jashim Uddin intersection into a battlefield.

The furious workers vandalised and looted Uttara House Building, North Tower, Amina Super Market, Mercantile Bank's Uttara branch, M/S Sarker and Co, Khandaker Filling Station and other establishments.

At one stage, the workers set fire to two vehicles, bearing number-plates Dhaka-Metro-Sha-11-0385 and Narayanganj-Ba-02-0065, near Abdullahpur crossing at around 9:30am.

When the police swung into action to disperse the unruly workers, they fought back and started to damage dozens of vehicles stranded on the Dhaka-Mymensingh Highway.

The situation immediately deteriorated and the police lathi-charged the agitators, fired 100 rounds of teargas cells and 60 rounds of rubber bullets on them, leaving more than 50 workers, including Naimur Rahman, the officer in-charge of Uttara police station, wounded.

A huge contingent of policemen and RAB members rushed to the spot and brought the situation under control at around 12:30pm.

Hundreds of workers brought out a procession from Motaleb Plaza at around 8:30am. When the procession was in front of Elegant Garments on Green Road, some hired goons attacked them, leaving 10 workers injured.

Our Narayanganj correspondent said that the workers brought out processions at Fatullah, Panchabati, Jamtola since the morning.

When the workers tried to march towards different factories in the town, the police lathi-charged them, leaving 20 workers injured.

Our Savar correspondent said at least 30 people, including policemen, were injured in a clash between police and agitating garment workers when they attacked and damaged 25 apparel factories and 10 vehicles in Savar.

Police arrested 15 workers, including Savar's regional leader of the National Garment Workers United Forum, Harunur Rashid, from the scene.

After hearing that Rashid had been arrested, the workers hurled brickbats at Cannon Garments Ltd, Apparel Ltd and JK Garments near the bus stand.

The workers of other local garment factories, on hearing the news, came out and barricaded the Dhaka-Aricha highway and damaged 10 cars, including a police car.

High officials of the police and different organisations, including BGMEA, visited the spot.

The leaders of the National Garment Workers United Forum claimed that the police had arrested at least 100 workers and injured more than 200 while they were on a peaceful strike.

Protesting against the police attack and demanding release of the arrested workers, the agitators announced a demonstration programme on Thursday at around 10:00am at Muktangan.

<http://libcom.org/news/more-strikes-and-riots-in-bangladesh-garment-workers-take-the-offensive-again-12102006>

More strikes and riots in Bangladesh - garment workers take the offensive again!

October 12th, 2006 by Ret Marut

Seven garment factories were severely damaged, while bosses claimed 100 other factories were vandalised; three shopping malls and 50 vehicles were also attacked on Tuesday (10th Oct) as thousands of striking garment workers fought pitched battles with the police and factory security forces in and around the capital, Dhaka. Over 100 people were injured in the clashes.



[Picture; rioters attack police van.]

Since the garment workers revolt in May-June, negotiations on promised concessions, improvements in conditions and setting of a minimum wage have broken down and/or the bosses have refused to implement them. It had previously been announced by unions that as a result of the stalemate a new wave of agitation would begin this week. There is a tantalising but vague report that workers at one point in the morning held a rally and "demanded minimum wage of Tk 3,000 [£24/\$45/EUR36], and chanted slogans against the leaders who, they alleged, had hatched a conspiracy against them." It is unclear, but "the leaders" seems to refer to their trade union leaders, presumably seeing the deal negotiated with bosses as an unsatisfactory sell-out. There is little evidence to suggest that union leaders (or any other body) dominate or lead the garment workers' struggles. (Though there is also a report that one attack on factories was provoked by the arrest of a union leader of the National Garment Workers United Forum, apparently one of the more grass roots unions based in the workers neighbourhoods.)

At 9am workers poured out of their factories in their thousands, marched to other factories still working and closed them down. Refining their tactics, they broke into smaller groups, attacking and looting factories and businesses. Vehicles were set on fire and roads blocked; due to force of numbers, the police could often only stand by and watch as workers attacked their bosses' property and looted. The main police tactic appeared to be to restrict movement of the demonstrators and contain the crowds within a limited area.

Cops and workers clashed several times in different locations, with numerous injuries on both sides and 35 teargas rounds being fired. Eventually a massive force of Rapid Action Battalion (RAB) paramilitaries and police reinforcements managed to regain control by 12.30pm.

In **Uttara**, a northern suburb of Dhaka, thousands of workers seized the Airport access road in the morning and a pitched battle ensued with cops, as a main traffic intersection "became a battlefield". Police baton-charged the crowd, "fired 100 rounds of teargas cells and 60 rounds of rubber bullets on them", leaving more than 50 workers and cops wounded. Workers looted offices, a supermarket, bank, filling station and other businesses. They also torched and damaged dozens of vehicles. Once again, a massive deployment of RAB and cops restored order by 12.30pm.

In **Narayanganj**, a river port town close to Dhaka, several processions of workers also clashed with cops.

At **Savar**, 24km northwest of Dhaka, vehicles were damaged and 25 garments factories attacked by workers. "Police arrested 15 workers, including Savar's regional leader of the National Garment Workers United Forum, Harunur Rashid, from the scene.

After hearing that Rashid had been arrested, the workers hurled brickbats at Cannon Garments Ltd, Apparel Ltd and JK Garments near the bus stand.

The workers of other local garment factories, on hearing the news, came out and barricaded the

Dhaka-Aricha highway and damaged 10 cars, including a police car....

...Protesting against the police attack and demanding release of the arrested workers, the agitators announced a demonstration programme on Thursday at around 10:00am at Mukhtangan."(New Age, 11/11/2006)

The garment bosses' federation, BGMEA, has demanded that the Government arrest several union leaders they have named as supposed instigators of the unrest, who they claim are in the pay of foreign sources. This same absurd claim implicating India and/or other commercial rivals as the root of the troubles was made after the May-June revolt, conveniently absolving garment bosses from any responsibility (and playing on time-honoured paranoia and prejudice against regional neighbours). A spokesman for the employers threatened a lockout of the workforce if unrest continues and the Government fails to contain the agitation. "If steps are not taken, we may close down our factories together for an indefinite period". Factory owners have already tried this at several factories in an attempt to starve workers into submitting to worse conditions. "“The ultimatum is to protect the industry,” claimed the BGMEA president. Meaning, to protect its bosses' profits. A decision on the lockout is expected today, Thursday.

Other news

Also on Tuesday, a national rail strike occurred against the proposed privatisation of the industry. Workers blocked tracks across the country. One station master was severely injured by angry passengers when he refused to let a train proceed on a blocked track; another had his Stationmaster's office burned by strikers when he attempted to move trains thru his station.

There have also this week been several more clashes between demonstrators protesting about the continuing power cuts (see previous reports here) across Bangladesh. The opposition parties are trying to exploit the issue, and assume leadership of the protests, for maximum political gain in the run up to the general election in the New Year.

<http://www.thedailystar.net/2006/10/13/d6101301085.htm>

RMG Violence

Owners seek govt steps to check unrest

Speak against shutdown

Staff Correspondent

Opposing Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association's (BGMEA) earlier threat to shut down garment units for an indefinite period, most of the factory owners yesterday sought government's immediate intervention to prevent further unrest in the industry.

The garment owners feared there might be more violence in the country's 75 per cent foreign exchange earning sector, especially on October 15 and 16, as some labour organisations called strike for the days.

Some owners warned of 'mass movement of owners and workers' if the violence in the garment sector continues.

Criticising the government's failure to protect the industry from the frequent violence during the last six months, the owners urged taking stringent security measures.

The owners also criticised the 14-party opposition alliance for 'supporting' the workers' strike.

At an emergency meeting presided over by BGMEA President SM Fazlul Hoque in the capital yesterday, garment owners gave their opinions to take 'proper' action against the unrest.

Earlier, following workers attacked on around 100 factories on October 10, BGMEA threatened to close down their factories for an indefinite period if the government fails to punish the people responsible for ransacking garment factories within 48 hours.

"I will meet the state minister for home affairs today [Wednesday] night to discuss the issue," the association president yesterday said, adding that he will also meet opposition leaders and labour leaders.

"Garment factories run with time. We have to maintain time at every stage of our production. So, it will not bring solution if we shut down our industries", said Azizul Islam, a garment owner.

He blamed the government for not taking adequate security measures to prevent unrest in the garment industry.

Anwarul Alam Chowdhury Parvez, former vice-president of BGMEA, is also against keeping the factories closed. "If the government can prevent grand rallies, why can't they prevent such unrest in the garment sector?" he said.

"If the political parties demonstrate with oars, sticks and sickles to get their rights, why don't we call such a movement against so-called workers' unrest"? Rashid Ahmed Hossaini of Nexus Group said.

He warned of 'mass movement of owners and workers' if the violence in the garment sector continues.

Harun-or-Rashid Chowdhury, former vice president of BGMEA, demanded that the government provide tight security at the factories.

"The government should investigate where they [workers' leaders] get the funds and who guide them towards destruction," BGMEA President SM fazlul Hoque said, adding, "They are trying to destroy the faith of buyers to shift the \$8 billion export industry from Bangladesh."

At Gazipur, Savar, Narayanganj, Jirabo, Malibagh and Old Dhaka, the law enforcers recently prevented the angry workers from destructive activities while in some other areas their role was questionable, Hoque said.