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http://www.upi.com/NewsTrack/Top_News/2007/09/22/bangladesh_protesters_defy_ban/3898/

Bangladesh protesters defy ban

Published: Sept. 22, 2007 at 8:32 PM

DHAKA, Bangladesh, Sept. 22 (UPI) -- About 10,000 people demonstrated Saturday in the capital of Bangladesh to protest low wages for garment workers.

The demonstrators called for better working conditions and a bigger annual bonus, The BBC reported.

The protest violated an emergency ban. Hundreds of police were on the scene.

Garment manufacture is Bangladesh's major export industry. Clothes made there are sold in

discount stores like Wal-Mart in the United States.

The protest targeted the Nassa Group, which was the first in the industry to pay its employees the Bangladeshi minimum wage, about \$25 a month. The wage was set last year after demonstrations.

Nazrul Islam Swapon, the group's managing director, said its employees have the best pay and benefits in the industry, The Daily Star said. He spoke at a news conference arranged by the Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association.

"During the last few weeks, a conspiracy is being carried out to annihilate the existence of the garment industry through destructive activities at numerous garment factories in Dhaka and Chittagong," said Shamsuddin Ahmed, the association's acting president

<http://www.bharattextile.com/newsitems/2005883>

BANGLADESH: Garment workers protest against poor wages and working conditions

BharatTextile.com (subscription), India - Sep 22, 2007

DHAKA: 25,000 textile workers protested against poor wages in Dhaka even though there is ban on public demonstrations. The workers demanded better pay and conditions. Hundreds of police, backed by army units, were deployed to disperse them. The protesters want increase in annual bonus which is due in a few weeks time.

The company involved in this dispute, the Nassa Group, is seen as one of Bangladesh's better employers and was among the first companies to pay its 27,000 workers the national minimum wage of \$25 (£13) a month - a figure agreed last year after a series of violent protests. It sells clothes around the world. Its customers include Wal-Mart in the US and Primark in the UK. Bangladeshi trade unions and campaigning groups in Europe and the US, where most the clothes are sold, have accused Bangladeshi factory owners of exploiting their mainly female workforce. But the owners say they need to keep costs down to stay in business.

The workers walked off the job in the Tejgaon Industrial Area in Dhaka and held protests in the streets, forcing the shutdown of most factories in the area. Police used batons to break up protests after demonstrators smashed the windows of several factories forcing the government to deploy additional army personnel and the elite Rapid Action Battalion. Police reported no injuries from their actions to disperse the protesters. Police said a bus was torched by workers after it hit three protesters.

Tejgaon is home to some of Bangladesh's top garment factories. Garments are Bangladesh's biggest export earners with sales abroad fetching more than nine billion dollars in the last fiscal year.

But the industry has been hit by a series of protests over low wages and poor working conditions. Sixteen factories were torched and hundreds vandalised last year in the country's worst ever labour unrest. The protests eventually stopped in 2006 when the government, unions and the employers agreed to a 25-dollar monthly minimum wage. There are many factories who have not yet implemented the minimum wage. In the latest warning, the government has said it will take legal action against factories that fail to implement the minimum wage by September 30.

Bangladesh has been under emergency rule since January 11 after elections were cancelled over vote-rigging allegations. The army-backed government has promised to reinstate democracy by holding fresh elections in late 2008 after cleaning up the nation's corrupt politics.

<http://news.trend.az/cgi-bin/readnews2.pl?newsId=1018207&lang=EN>

22.09.2007 21:42:27

Garment workers protest in Dhaka

(BBC) - Thousands of garment workers in Bangladesh's capital, Dhaka, have defied a ban on public protests to demand better pay and conditions.

The dispute had been brewing for days, but became more serious and violent when the workers discovered that they had been locked out of their factory.

Hundreds of police, backed by army units, were deployed to disperse them.

Garments are Bangladesh's biggest export earners - accounting for 75% of total export earnings last year.

The police say that 10,000 workers took to the streets of Dhaka on Saturday in defiance of the government which, using its emergency laws, has banned all public demonstrations.

Minimum wage

The protesters are demanding that their employers increase their allowances, including their annual bonus which is due in a few weeks time.

The company involved in this dispute, the Nassa Group, sells clothes around the world. Its customers include Wal-Mart in the US and Primark in the UK.

It is seen as one of Bangladesh's better employers and was among the first companies to pay its 27,000 workers the national minimum wage of \$25 (?13) a month - a figure agreed last year after a series of violent protests.

Bangladeshi trade unions and campaigning groups in Europe and the US, where most the clothes are sold, have accused Bangladeshi factory owners of exploiting their mainly female workforce.

But the owners say they need to keep costs down to stay in business.

Published On: 2007-09-23

Demand for Hiked Iftar Allowance, Eid Bonus

Tejgaon garment workers vandalise 20 factories

Staff Correspondent

Several thousand garment workers staged fierce demonstrations against sudden closure of a factory in Tejgaon Industrial Area yesterday.

At least 20 factories were damaged and a bus torched during the agitation that prompted owners to close almost all the factories in the city's industrial hub for the day.

Besides, a fight between the protesters and those refusing to join in left over 50 people including law enforcers injured.



Agitating workers of garment factories torch a bus during yesterday's violence at Tejgaon in the capital. Photo: STAR

Tension has been simmering over the last couple of days with the workers of Nassa Mainland garment factory at Begunbari demanding increases in iftar allowance and Eid bonus.

But it all reached fever pitch yesterday morning after the Nassa Group authorities had responded by shuttering four units.

Around 3,000 workers took to the streets immediately after finding out about the shutdown at around 8:30am. They went on the rampage, smashing windowpanes of the factories in the area.

Several hundred army and Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) personnel were drafted in to control the situation. They opted not to use force and let things calm down on their own.

Vehicular movement on the Tongi Diversion Road remained suspended for three hours beginning from 9:00am as the workers barricaded the otherwise teeming thoroughfare.

At one stage of the demonstrations defying the ban on gatherings under the state of emergency, workers and employees of Kohinoor Chemicals, Sepal Garments Ltd and Orion Pharmaceuticals Ltd clashed with those vandalising their factories.

Several policemen were injured, trying to break up the fight. They showed restraint and chased only the marauding workers, police officials said.

Two army personnel suffered wounds in stone-throwing between the two groups in front of Sepal Garments Ltd.

Police arrested three people during the melee. However, no case was filed as of filing this report at 12:30am.

In processions, the demonstrators went to other factories and asked fellow workers to rally support in their favour. But the authorities convinced their workers not to walk out, said eyewitnesses.

The protests turned even more violent following a rumour that three workers had died after a bus carrying workers of Sepal Garments Ltd and Wasa staff ran them over near Nabisco crossing.

In effect, the three suffered minor injuries when the driver of the bus chased by some unruly youth lost control and hit them.

Immediately afterwards, the workers torched the bus and damaged glasses of at least eight other buses parked in the area.

Kohinoor Chemicals, Nassa Group's headquarters and the closed Nassa Mainland, Sunshine Knitwear, a factory of Hamim group, Focus Garments, Associates Garments, Orion Pharmaceuticals Ltd, Power Pack Volvo and Sepal Garment are among the factories damaged.

Employees of the closed factory said they came to work at 7:00am but found the gate locked and a notice posted on it.

Signed by the Nassa group's Managing Director Nazrul Islam Swapan, the notice read, "Four units of the garment factory have been declared closed for an indefinite period from 6:00am today under section 13/1 of Bangladesh Labour Act, 2004."

It also mentioned that the workers did not join their work in the last two days constituting a breach of the labour law.

The attendance register however showed that most of the workers worked on Friday. "I worked from 7:00am to 3:30pm yesterday [Friday]," Abdul Karim, a machine operator, told The Daily Star. His attendance card corroborated his claim.

The units that have been declared closed are Nassa Knit Ltd, Nassa Apparels Ltd (unit-2), Starlight Knitwear Ltd (unit-2) and Western Dresses Ltd.

The closure followed Thursday's demonstrations for an increase in iftar allowance and Eid bonus.

The same day the workers went to the group's head office on Mohakhali-Gulshan Link Road and placed a memorandum calling on the factory authorities to increase the Eid bonus to 85

percent of their basic, iftar allowance to Tk 25 from present Tk 5, monthly attendance bonus to Tk 300 from Tk 100.

Besides, they sought assurance that none of them would be sacked or subjected to any other harassment. In reply, the owners said hopefully they would reach an amicable solution through discussion.

But on Friday, the MD announced that he would neither raise the iftar allowance or bonuses, rather he would cease to run the factory since what he claimed was the workers had walked out on their job.

Meanwhile, police sources said when their officials were looking to mediate between the owners and the workers yesterday morning, MD Nazrul Islam Swapan wrote to the concerned police station, seeking security as he was going to shut the factory.

The Nassa group authorities also requested the police to quell the unrest and said they would somehow get the workers to resume work, added the sources.

Deputy Commissioner of Tejgaon Zone of Dhaka Metropolitan Police Mahbubur Rahman told The Daily Star yesterday that they had requested the factory owner to settle down the issue through negotiations but to no effect.

“We asked them to resolve the issue to avoid untoward incidents. But they said they were not bound to have talks with the workers,” said a top police official seeking anonymity.

He added that when they urged the authorities to pay the workers their arrears before shutting down the factory, the factory executives said they would disburse the outstanding salaries sometime in future and a notice would be issued to that effect.

Police sources said the incident took place due to arrogance on the owner's side.

A number of affected workers said the owner used to force them to work under inhuman conditions. They alleged that factory officials would forfeit a significant part of the salary and overtime bill if anyone was found taking rest even for a minute during work hours.

One of them said, “They beat us up even for a minor mistake.”

<http://www.nosweat.org.uk/node/598>

Bangladeshi workers riot against sweatshop poverty

Sunday Mirror, 23 Sept 07

Tesco have pledged to investigate conditions at a chain of sweatshops in Bangladesh after workers demanding better pay rioted and set fire to a building yesterday.

More than 1,000 poverty-stricken clothing makers stormed the Dhaka headquarters of Nassa,

a chain of 28 factories, whose clients include Tesco, H&M and Primark.

The violent scenes in Bangladeshi capital come a month after a Sunday Mirror investigation exposed the appalling conditions suffered by Nassa factory workers. Several revealed how they were beaten for not working quickly enough on gruelling 14-hour shifts which earn them just 4p an hour.

Nassa director Khandakar Alam pledged to investigate their complaints - but in fact little has changed. The lack of action - and the fact staff had not been paid their traditional bonus for working during religious festival Eid - sparked the riot.

Yesterday a spokesman for Tesco, who sell clothes made at two Nassa factories, said: "We are very proud of our high ethical standards. As a responsible organisation we will of course discuss the issue with Nassa to make sure we understand the issues the workers were protesting about."

H&M and Primark did not comment. Other High Street giants including Asda, M&S, Debenhams and Woolworths also produce clothes in Bangladesh, the third poorest country in the world.

There are more than 4,000 garment factories in Dhaka. In many, thousands of workers are dangerously packed into a tiny space to meet garment orders.

<http://www.allheadlinenews.com/articles/7008605882>

At least 50 Hurt As Apparel Workers Clash In Bangladesh Capital

September 23, 2007 1:35 p.m. EST

Siddique Islam - AHN South Asia Correspondent

Dhaka, Bangladesh (AHN) - At least 50 people were hurt when hundreds of garment factory workers clashed with police, and other workers, at the Tejgaon Industrial Area in the capital, Dhaka on Saturday.

The injured included four police officers and other damages included seven factories vandalized and 10 vehicles damaged as several hundred garment factory workers went on a rampage.

The incident started at 10 a.m. local time when the workers of Nassa Group, a local company, saw that all four garment units of the group were under lock and key. The workers began the demonstrations when they saw the notice pasted on the main factory gate, witnesses said.

Workers of the Nassa Group have staged demonstrations over the past two days demanding Eid-bonus, attendance bonus and other increased allowances.

The demonstrating workers also approached the workers of the nearby Shefal Group, another local company. But the workers at that factory refused to join the demonstration of Nassa Group's workers.

At one stage, the workers of the Shefal Group chased the angry workers of Nassa Group that led to a violent clash between the two groups. The law men controlled the situation at about Saturday noon.

Deputy Commissioner of Tejgaon Zone of Dhaka Metropolitan Police Mahbubur Rahman told The Daily Star, a local newspaper, on Saturday that they had requested the factory owner to settle the issue through negotiations but to no effect.

Meanwhile, the Bangladesh Garment Manufactures and Exporters Association (BGMEA) strongly protested the incident. It demanded stern action against those responsible for the unrest.

Addressing a hurriedly called press conference at its office in the capital, Dhaka, Acting BGMEA President ABM Shamsuddin Ahmed claimed that a vested quarter was instigating violence to destroy the apparel sector.

"Real garment workers are not involved in setting fire and vandalizing the garment factories. There has been a vested quarter in guise of labor leaders who instigated the unexpected incident," the BGMEA acting president said at the press conference.