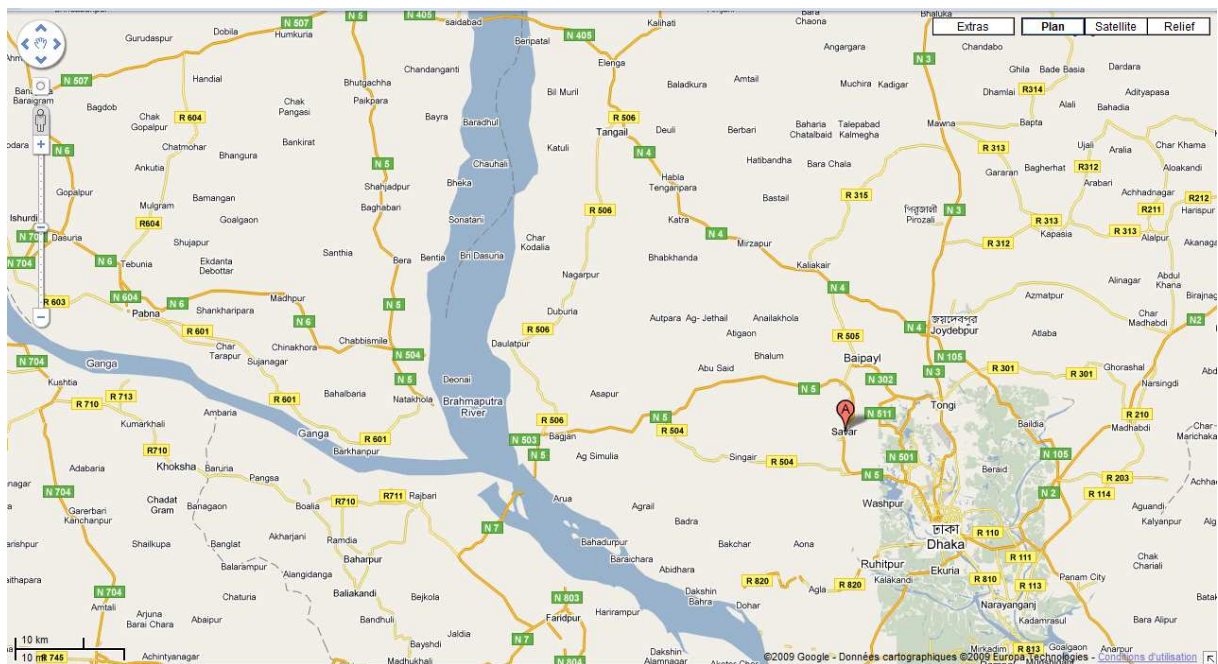
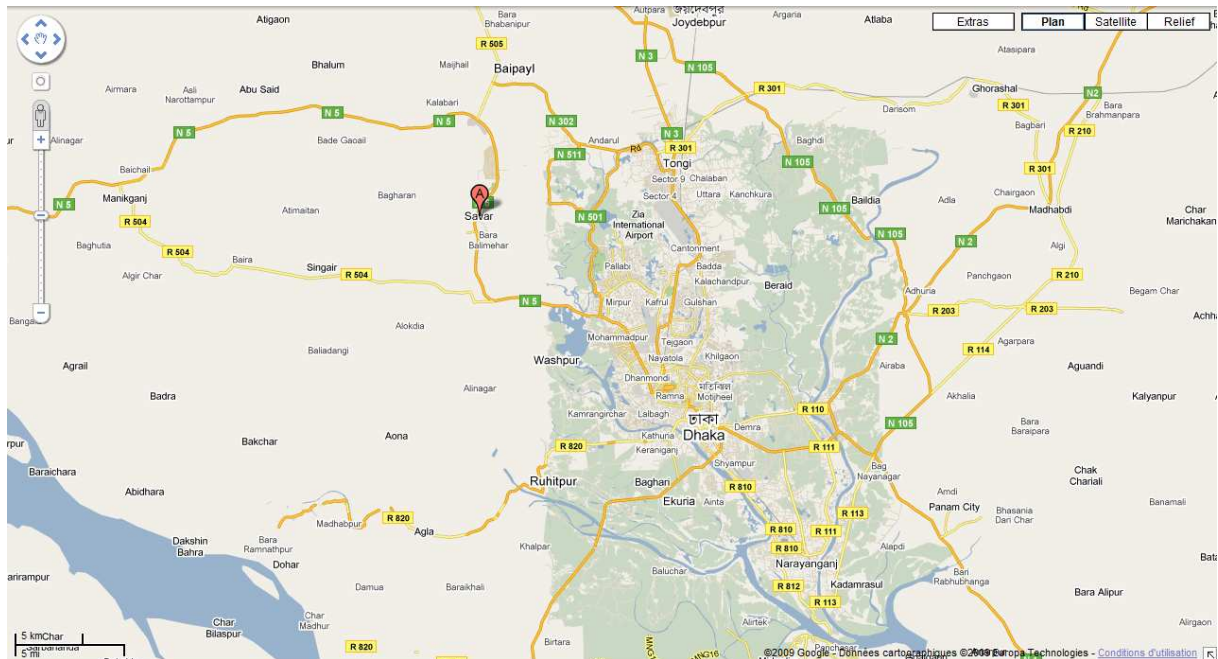


## 08 BAN 5 – 08-08-09 Savar

Laboratoire des frondeurs.org



<http://www.newagebd.com/2008/aug/08/front.html#3>

## RMG unit owners seek security fearing labour unrest in Ramadan

Mustafizur Rahman

Garment factory owners on Thursday sought security from the government for readymade garment units, mostly in Dhaka and Chittagong, as they fear labour unrest might flare up before Ramadan over due wages and other benefits.

The owners requested stringent measures in case of any deviation from laws either by workers or the owners to save the factories from being destroyed.

‘We are very much concerned about labour unrest which may flare up any time in Ramadan, aggravating the situation,’ the Bangladesh Garments Manufacturers and Exporters Association president, Anwar-Ul Alam Chowdhury, told New Age on Thursday after a meeting with the home affairs adviser, MA Matin, at the secretariat.

A seven-member delegation, led by the association president, called on Matin in his office seeking security for the apparel sector. Former association president Annisul Huq, now the president of the Federation of Bangladesh Chambers and Commerce Industries, also attended the meeting.

The delegation requested the adviser to work out a guideline for them after a consultation with the commerce and labour advisers by Sunday to save the factories from being attacked.

Anwar-Ul Alam feared once the workers get involved in violence while rallying for due wages and other benefits, such incidents of violence spread to compliant factories causing damage to the sector which earned \$10.7 billion in foreign exchange in the past financial year.

‘Unrest may flare up fast this time and good factories will come under attack as all find it hard to cope with the essential goods price spiral,’ he said.

The factory owners want the government should contain any unrest in the sector heavily-handedly so that the workers do not dare to launch any movement anywhere sparking off violence also in good factories, said sources attending the meeting.

Matin assured the workers of strict implementation of laws in case of any violation.

Unrest in garment factories resulting from non-payment of wages and benefits led to violent incidents several times in Dhaka and Chittagong in violation of the Emergency Powers Rules, which came into force in January 2007.

A number of factories, according to intelligence reports, are vulnerable to labour unrest as the owners are not regularly paying the workers in accordance with the agreement made by the owners, workers and the government.

The government of Fakhruddin Ahmed earlier formed a crisis management cell at the association, involving, among others, law enforcement agencies to tackle any untoward incidents in the garment sector.

The government believes non-payment of wages to poor workers was one of the main reasons for labour unrest in the readymade garment sector.

Violent labour unrest in the garment sector, which caused blood-shed and damage to factories, forced the government to form a tripartite wage commission in June 2006 to suggest a new pay scale as the minimum wage had remained unchanged for 12 years.

The commission on October 5 finalised the apparel workers’ pay structure, setting the minimum wage at Tk 1,662.50 from Tk 930 and the government on October 22 gazetted the new wages.

The workers expected increased wages to be paid by December 2006. But still many factories are yet to comply with the agreement.

A total of 4,100 out of 5,000 garments factories are registered with the Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters’ Association and the Bangladesh Knitwear Manufacturers and Exporters’ Association.

‘A total of 2,765 factories are in operation now and almost all of them have implemented the minimum wages,’ the BGMEA president claimed.

Published On: 2008-08-10

Front Page

## **Garment workers clash with Ansars**

### **2 bullet-hit**

Staff Correspondent

Clashes between garment workers and Ansars at Nayarhat in Ashulia yesterday left four people injured, two of them with gunshots.

For overnight assaults on two of their fellows, workers of Biswas Synthetic Ltd attacked the Ansars camp on the factory premises at around 9:30am. The Ansars replied by shooting at the protesters.

Later, the camp was withdrawn in the face of demonstrations.

The injured were admitted to local hospital and clinic. Of them, two are workers and two factory officials.

The employees agitated also for regular payment of salary, introduction of eight-hour work period and removal of the general manager.

Production remained suspended throughout the day for clashes and agitation.

Witnesses said the Ansars personnel deployed in the factory slapped two employees on the graveyard shift. In the morning, co-workers of the two flew into a rage when they learned about the incident.

They called for immediate action against those responsible. But as the factory authorities did not respond, they attacked the Ansars camp.

The Ansars fired at least 15 shots to disperse the demonstrators armed with sticks and stones.

During the clashes, workers Faruq Ahmed and Atiqur Rahman were shot in the leg while security officer of the factory Abdul Qaiyum and laboratory in-charge Abul Hasan were wounded in stone throwing.

The situation came under control with police reaching the scene after about an hour.

In response to the workers' complaints, the Ansars high command in the evening ordered withdrawal of the camp and closed those who were on duty there to the battalion headquarters.

Rafiqul Islam, officer-in-charge of Ashulia Police Station, told The Daily Star, "The workers were already annoyed with behaviours of some Ansars men. Friday night's incident only added to their anger."

He said a magistrate would carry out an executive enquiry into yesterday's shooting.

## **15 injured as ansar men fire at Savar RMG workers**

Staff Correspondent

At least 15 people were injured as on-duty ansar men opened fire on the garment workers protesting against assault on two of their fellows at a Savar factory Saturday.

Two of the factory workers sustained critical bullet injuries and admitted to a local hospital. Witnesses and police said ansar men beat two workers Zahid and Raju of Biswas Synthetics Limited, a concern of Biswas Group, located at Mirzanagar at Savar as they fell asleep during their night shift duty hours Friday.

Hearing the incident, several hundred workers of the factory staged demonstration since Saturday morning and demanded punishment of the responsible ansars.

As the factory authority did not respond to their demand, the workers equipped with rods, sticks, stones and brickbats attacked the ansar camp inside the factory at around 9:30 am. The ansar men instantly started firing into the crowd and angry workers retaliated with brickbats.

Two workers, Faruk Hossain and Atiqur Rahman, collapsed with bullet wounds in the legs as at least 15 shots were fired, factory sources said.

This infuriated the workers further and prompted them to vandalise the factory and damage windowpanes until huge contingent of police and Rapid Action Battalion brought the situation under control at around 2:00 pm.

Agitating workers demanded withdrawal of the ansar camp from the factory and removal of factory general manager Shafiqul Islam.

They also demanded payment of their salaries on the 20th of every month.

General manager of Biswas Synthetics Limited, Shafiqul Islam told New Age, 'The demands of the workers are illegal and what they have done over a trifling matter is unacceptable.'

Officer-in-charge of the Ashulia police station Rafiqul Islam told New Age, 'Ansars opened fire to save their lives and the factory property.'

He said the authority already removed the ansar camp from the factory.

'No case was filed in this connection,' the OC said.

Workers Faruk and Atiq, security in charge Abul Hasan and laboratory in charge Kaiyum were admitted to Savar Gana Sasthya Hospital.

Published On: 2008-08-11

Front Page

### **Agitation for Arrears**

## **Workers vandalise 15 RMG factories; 60 units close**

*Factory in Gazipur set ablaze; owners blame 'outsiders'*

Staff Correspondent

Garment workers demanding back pay yesterday ransacked at least 15 garment factories and four shopping centres at Jamgorah in Ashulia on the outskirts of the capital.

The violence triggered closing of more than 60 garment factories in the area.

The agitating workers also blockaded the Dhaka-Tangail highway for over two hours and vandalized three vehicles, causing panic and a severe traffic jam.

At least 20 people were injured as police clubbed the mob of agitators to restore order in the area.

Meanwhile in Dhaka Export Processing Zone (DEPZ), two garment factories -- Softex Sweater Factory and Feather Light -- were shut down for various other reasons. Softex was closed due to labour unrest while Feather Light for insufficient work order, said sources.

In a late development, angry workers set fire to a factory of Meem Garments in Gazipur around 8:30pm yesterday damaging a huge quantity of fabrics and yarns.

Five units of fire fighters from Tongi and Gazipur rushed to the spot and put out the blaze around 11:00pm.

Both fire service and police officials confirmed that angry workers set fire to the factory at one stage of their protest demanding payment of overdue wages and Eid bonuses.

Workers of two other nearby factories also ransacked the factories they work in.

Meanwhile, workers of Meditex Sweater Factory in Konabari area under Gazipur Sadar upazila abstained from work yesterday, and workers of Euro Fashion Ltd at Masterbari under Sripur upazila staged a sit-in in front of the factory, both in demand for pay hikes.

According to eyewitness accounts, in Ashulia over 300 workers of Polonia Garments Ltd gathered in front of the factory premises for their overdue salaries at around 11:00am yesterday, the day that had been previously fixed by the factory authorities for the disbursement of salaries.

The unpaid workers became furious and started to ransack the factory as they found the main gate of the factory locked.

The situation turned worse when over 1,000 workers, armed with bamboo sticks and stones, from neighbouring factories joined Polonia workers and attacked other factories on the Dhaka-Tangail highway. Windowpanes, doors and furniture of the factories were damaged in the attack.

The factories that came under attack are Polonia Garments Ltd, Sed Fashion Ltd, Eastern Link Creation Ltd, Rivas Composit Ltd, Envoy Fashion, Scan Desk Ltd, Setara Group Ltd, Nodh Tex, Design Dreams Ltd, Universe Garments Ltd, Isa Fashion Ltd, Pall Mall Garments, Five Brother Ltd, and GBS Garments.

The shopping centres vandalised by the mob are Samir Plaza, Helen Plaza, Nigar Plaza, and Noor Jahan Mansion.

Panic gripped stranded passengers and vehicle owners on the highway when the workers started vandalising vehicles.

Rafiqul Islam, officer-in-charge (OC) of Ashulia police station, told The Daily Star that the workers became angry as they did not receive their overdue salaries on time. "The authorities however paid off the salaries in the afternoon," said the OC adding that no case was filed and no one was arrested.

Owners of the affected garment factories yesterday denied the allegation of non-payment to the workers and reiterated that a section of hooligan outsiders in the guise of workers ransacked their factories.

Owner of Envoy Fashion Ltd, Salam Murshedy, also a leader of Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA), said his factory was ransacked by a section of hooligan outsiders who were masquerading as workers. "The workers did not attack my factory," Murshedy said.

He said suddenly a group of outsiders tried to enter his factory, but the workers of the factory obstructed them.

The outsiders then threw stones and broke glass panes and other furniture, he added. Similarly, the outsiders ransacked other nearby factories, he said.

Murshedy said he will continue production in his factory today, as the damage to the factory is has not been severe.

"At least 5,000 workers are employed in my factory producing 45,000 apparel items a day. So, I cannot stop production as I pay the workers regularly," he said.

Nazma Akter, president of Sammilito Garment Sramik Federation, a platform of garment factory workers, said the workers agitation broke out for a pay hike in the wake of higher prices of essential commodities.

She said although the majority of owners pay salaries under the current wage structure, the minimum wage of Tk 1,662.50 a month is too little to maintain livelihoods. "So, it needs to be increased through negotiations, but not by damaging factories," she added.

She said the government should also come forward to settle the issue of low salaries of the workers. "The workers, owners and government officials may sit together again for a solution," she said.

BGMEA President Anwar-Ul-Alam Chowdhury Parvez said the nature of the attack indicates that the rampage was carried out by outsiders, not by real workers.

"Only the compliant factories were ransacked. The factories those were attacked are all good in payment and in corporate culture," he said.

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<http://www.newagebd.com/2008/aug/11/front.html#4>

## **Garment workers on rampage for increased pay, dues**

*Vehicles, factories vandalised at Ashulia, unit set on fire in Gazipur*

Staff Correspondent

Workers on Sunday damaged a number of garment factories and blocked the Dhaka–Tangail Highway at Jamgara of Ashulia in Dhaka demanding payment of salaries and dues.

RMG unit workers also went out on demonstrations, vandalised vehicles and set fire to a factory in Gazipur, demanding increased wages and payment of dues.

They also vandalised a number of vehicles as the police charged at them with truncheons. More than 20 protesters were injured.

The local people and the police said the workers of the Polonia Garments Limited, shut down on August 2, went to the factory at Jamgara in the morning for salaries and dues, but they found the entrance locked up.

The workers then took to the streets and blocked the highway at about 11:00am. Several hundred vehicles were stranded on both ends of the road stretch.

At one point, they started marching and fellows from other factories joined them. They pelted the factories by the road with stones. The window panes of more than a dozen factories and shopping malls were damaged. A number of vehicles were also vandalised.

The authorities of all other factories in the area closed their units fearing further agitation.

The police reached the spot and charged at the workers with truncheon, injuring more than 20 of the protesters. Police deployment was then reinforced to control the situation.

Polonia workers said the authorities had closed the factory on August 2 without any notice and said the payment of salary and other allowances would be made on Sunday. But no one from the management went to the factory which was found locked up.

The factory owner, Abdul Kader, however, said the workers would be paid by the evening.

A senior Dhaka Export Processing Zone official said the Softex Sweater Factory closed the unit on Sunday for ‘unjust’ demands of the workers. The Featherlight Factory in the zone also closed the unit till August 20, the official said.

In Gazipur, the workers of at least 10 garment factories went out on demonstrations, vandalised the factories and set a factory on fire.

Local people, factory workers and the police said the workers of the Delta Group at Kashimpur had been out on demonstrations for a few days demanding increased wages.

They abstained from work and held rallies Sunday morning as the authorities refused to meet their demands.

At one point, they vandalised the factory. The police obstructed them as they tried to attack neighbouring factories. At least five workers were injured in the incident.

The workers of six factories also went out on demonstrations at Sreepur demanding increased wages and payment of dues.

The workers came out of the factories as some people, reportedly hired by the owners, chased them, leading to a clash. At least 15 were injured. The police controlled the situation in the afternoon.

The workers of the Meem Sweaters at Basan in the district headquarters had been out on demonstrations for the whole day.

As the authorities did not heed their demands, they set fire to the factory warehouse and the generator room at about 8:00pm. Fire engines from Tongi and Gazipur were trying to put out the flames till 9:00pm.

The workers of two other factories at Konabari and Khaikair also rallied for payment of salaries and dues.

## **RMG wages reduced by 46pc due to high inflation**

Staff Correspondent

The problems of the Bangladeshi garment factory workers, who have always lived on a razor's edge because their legally set minimum wages have always been less than the minimum cost of living, have been further aggravated by the exorbitant price-hikes of essentials in the past two years which have reduced their net wages by about 46 per cent.

An alliance of the garment sector workers' organization on Sunday demanded that the government and industry should immediately start revising the existing wage structure and initially declare 50 per cent dearness allowance.

The National Alliance for Protection of Garment Workers and Industries submitted a memorandum, containing their demands, to the adviser and secretary to the labour and employment ministry.

'The minimum salary of a garment worker was set two years back at Tk 1,662.50, but due to high inflation the real wages have declined to Tk 900 now,' said the alliance.

The alliance demanded that the minimum wage of a worker be set at Tk 4,500 to enable him/her to maintain a minimum standard of living.

'Revising wages is not only justified, but has become essential,' said the alliance, arguing that the minimum wage board rules provide the option that if there are changes in socio-economic conditions the wages will be revised.

The alliance said poor wages and high inflation were forcing workers to protest and agitate in factories, which have become regular occurrences.

It also regretted that due to the existence of the Emergency Powers Rules, the workers are now barred from their democratic right of protesting against any injustice or deprivation.

## **Bangladesh; garment workers attack factories as thousands wildcat and riot**

August 11th, 2008 by Ret Marut



The ongoing unrest in the garment factories continues...

*Savar, Dhaka area*; thousands of garment workers came out on strike over the weekend in a new outbreak of unrest. On Friday 8th Aug two workers on the overnight 'graveyard' shift at



Biswas Synthetics Limited were caught sleeping by 'ansar men', who then assaulted them. (Ansars are a civilian volunteer defence group, an auxiliary to the professional security forces; they have had numerous clashes with garment workers in recent years. Their disciplinary role in this workplace is an indication of the high level of class struggle now occurring.)

Already unhappy with the ansar military presence in the factory, for hundreds of workers arriving for the Saturday morning shift hearing of the assault was the last straw; 400 mainly women workers had recently been sacked with no warning and without receiving wages owed. The new shift refused to begin work and demonstrated for payment of wage arrears, punishment of the ansars, and removal of the factory manager. The factory bosses failing to respond, at 9.30am a scuffle occurred between demonstrators and ansars, who retreated to their camp in the factory grounds. Workers then attacked the ansar camp with sticks, stones and bricks. The ansars responded with rifle fire into the crowd, injuring at least two workers with serious leg wounds.

Workers spent the next four hours vandalising the factory until a huge contingent of police and soldiers arrived and eventually brought the situation under control by 2pm. The ansar camp has since been removed from the factory.

*Dhaka, the capital*; on Sunday morning 300 workers of Polonia Garments Ltd gathered in expectation of payment of owed wages, as promised by management. Finding the factory gates locked, furious workers began ransacking the factory. Events escalated when over 1,000 workers from neighbouring factories - armed with bamboo sticks and stones - joined Polonia workers and attacked other factories on the Dhaka-Tangail highway. Highway traffic was blocked for two hours.

Workers spread the trouble throughout the area; 15 factories RMG factories and four shopping centres were attacked as rioting continued through the day. Strikes demanding pay rises occurred in at least three other factories and 60 factories were closed in response to the violence. Later, at around 8:30pm, roving workers set fire to an RMG factory in Gazipur, damaging a huge quantity of fabrics and yarns.

### **Concessions won**

As inflation continues to eat into workers wages and demonstrations and strikes increase, the employers' organisation - Bangladesh Knitwear Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BKMEA) - has announced it will open five 'fair price shops' to sell subsidised staple foods to its workers. They have also hinted at an 'inflation allowance' (probably 20% of current wages) being paid.

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<http://www.thedailystar.net/story.php?nid=50068>

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Front Page

**Restive RMG Sector**

**Over 3,000 sued for violence in Gazipur, Ashulia**

Staff Correspondent

Two cases and three general diaries were filed yesterday against over 3,000 workers for torching a garment factory in Gazipur and vandalising several others at Ashulia and the Dhaka Export Processing Zone (DEPZ) on Sunday night.

Meem Designs Ltd Chairman Mizanur Rahman Chowdhury filed a case with Gazipur Police Station in the morning accusing over 1,500 workers of damaging valuables worth Tk 50 crore.

The complainant said unruly workers vandalised and set valuables and properties of the factory ablaze.

Diluna Barua, sub-inspector of Gazipur Police Station, told The Daily Star that none had been arrested.

Sources said the agitating workers of the factory went on a rampage and set fire to valuables during a demonstration demanding payment of their due salaries.

Another case was filed with Ashulia Police Station by Saiful Islam, administrative officer of Softext Traders at the DEPZ, against several hundred workers for staging demonstrations and creating unrest at the factory. The accused include 24 workers who allegedly provoked other factory workers.

The authorities on Sunday closed the factory indefinitely.

Ashulia police said they were yet to arrest anyone in this connection.

Meanwhile, Jopon Bhowmik, director of Sed Fashion Ltd at Jamgorah, filed three general diaries with Ashulia Police Station mentioning that several hundred outside workers attacked their factories thrice on Sunday.

Agitating workers on Sunday vandalised 15 garment factories and four shopping centres at Jamgorah in Ashulia while angry workers in Gazipur set fire to a factory and damaged two others demanding payment of arrears and hike in wage.

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<http://www.newagebd.com/2008/aug/12/front.html#11>

## **Workers continue demos in Gazipur, Dhaka for wage hike**

Our Correspondent . Gazipur

Workers of different garments factories in Savar in Dhaka and Gazipur on Monday observed strike and held protest rallies on various demands, including increase in wages. Agitated workers also vandalised at least two factories in Gazipur.

In Gazipur, the authorities of Mim Garments were taking preparation to file a case against 1500 unidentified workers who ransacked the unit, causing a loss of Tk 50 crore.

The police and local sources said several hundred workers of Mondal Group at Nayapara in Konabari BSCIC area under sadar upazila observed strike, demanding 20 per cent increase in their wages. At one stage, the workers went out from the factory campus and some of them tried to vandalise the factory but police foiled the attempt.

At about 5:00pm, the workers left the factory when the authorities assured them that they would sit with the workers on Wednesday. The authorities closed the factory.

The workers of Delta Group at Jarun observed strike and held protest meeting on the same demand. The authorities closed the factory amid the unrest.

On the same demand for wage hike, workers of Meditex Sweater Factory at Parijat Horinar Chala and Standard Garments of Jarun observed strike.

Informed, the police went to the spot and brought the situation under control.

United News of Bangladesh reports from Savar: Workers at four garment factories at Savar on Monday stopped works and staged demonstrations to realise their demands, including payment of arrears and removal of five labour leaders, as a latest spell of unrest continued jolting the export industry.

The four factories are Beximco Fashion Ltd, Tista High Fashion and A-One in Dhaka Export Processing Zone and Jonoran Sweater Factory at Nishchintapur of Ashulia.

But the situation at Jamgara, where labour unrest took place on Sunday, returned to normalcy on Monday.

Some 2,000 workers from Beximco Fashion demonstrated in front of Customs gate of DEPZ at 12noon On Monday, demanding payment of their arrears.

They also blocked the road. The workers left the place peacefully when an official of the factory assured them of giving their arrears. He also informed that the factory would remain closed on Tuesday and Wednesday.

Some 1,800 workers of A-One factory observed work abstention Monday and staged demonstrations on demand for withdrawing case filed against some of their colleagues on charge of ransacking the factory on July 22.

Some 700 workers of Tista High Fashion also observed work abstention for the second day on Monday demanding removal of WRWC leaders Mizanur Rahman, Abdur Rahim, Monir Hossain, Sanoara Begum and Mainur Rahman.

They joined their work at 3:30pm when the factory management removed the five worker-leaders.

On the other hand, 200 workers from knitting section of Jonoran Sweater factory at Ashulia stopped work, demanding increase in the price rate for per-piece work they do.

‘As the authorities did not pay heed to their demand, they peacefully left the factory at noon,’ says a spot account of the protest.

On Sunday, workers, agitating over arrear payments, damaged 15 garment factories and four nearby markets during demonstrations in the industrial area.

Fifteen workers were injured as police charged them with baton during the rampage.

Violence also erupted in some Gazipur factories Sunday in similar situations-and the warehouse of a factory was set ablaze.

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<http://www.thedailystar.net/story.php?nid=50426>

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Front Page

### **Demo For Pay Hike**

## **50 RMG workers hurt in joint forces action**

Staff Correspondent

Over 50 workers of a garment factory at Shreepur in Gazipur were injured yesterday when members of the joint forces, Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) and police fired gunshots and teargas shells and charged truncheons on them.

The law enforcers went into action to disperse the agitating workers who blockaded the Dhaka-Mymensingh Highway for over three hours demanding pay hike.

Witnesses said the angry workers of Reedisha Knitex Ltd located at Nayanpur of Shreepur upazila also pelted brickbats and stones at the law enforcers.

Earlier, the workers ransacked the factory building and attacked the staffers.

Factory authorities alleged that at least 15 of their staff were wounded in the attacks.

Sources said at 1:00pm during lunch break, over 5,000 workers of the factory staged a demonstration inside the factory to press home their demand for hiking salaries. They started ransacking the factory as their officials did not respond to their demand. When the factory staff tried to resist them the workers swooped on them.

The workers came down on the street at about 2:30pm and blockaded the Dhaka-Mymensingh Highway. Several hundred vehicles got stranded on the busy road.

The workers lay down on the road and chanted slogans for three hours before over 300 law enforcers rushed to the spot and asked the agitating workers to remove the blockade.

The law enforcers also asked the factory authorities to assure the workers of increasing their salaries but none of them responded.

At about 6:00pm the law enforcers went into action firing over 50 gunshots and charging truncheon to disperse the workers.

Many injured workers were rushed to Dhaka Medical College Hospital while a few others to different local hospitals and clinics.

Gazipur Superintendent of Police Abdul Baten told The Daily Star that the law personnel were forced to go into action as the workers did not pay any heed to their request for freeing the highway.

"We requested both the factory authorities and the workers but none of them gave any response. If the factory authorities responded, such an untoward incident would not have occurred," he said.

MA Khayer, director (corporate affairs) of the factory, meanwhile, termed the workers' demands "illegal". In a press release, he claimed that the factory has been providing its workers with all the facilities fixed by Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA).

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<http://www.thedailystar.net/story.php?nid=50383>

Published On: 2008-08-14  
Metropolitan

**Garment workers protest delay in salary payment**

Staff Correspondent

Several hundred workers of a garment factory in the city's Rampura area protesting delay in their salary payment yesterday staged a demonstration.

They also set up a blockade on DIT Road that led to a severe traffic jam for about one hour.

Later, police took the situation under their control.

Witnesses said over 600 workers of Stylink Garments Ltd took to the street at around 11:00am as the authorities did not pay their salaries within the scheduled date on August 10.



**Workers of Stylink Garments Ltd stage a demonstration at Rampura in the city yesterday protesting delay in payment of their salary.**

**Photo: STAR**

Officer-in-Charge Sheikh Mohammad Abu Zahid of Khilgaon Police Station said the workers stopped the demonstration and removed the blockade after the authorities assured them of paying their salaries today.

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<http://libcom.org/news/bangladesh-carrot-stick-security-forces-fire-garment-workers-government-recalls-unions-1608>

## **Bangladesh: carrot and stick - security forces fire on garment workers as government recalls unions**

August 16th, 2008 by Ret Marut



Garment workers continue their agitations... and the uncertain role of unions.

*Wednesday 13 Aug - Dhaka;* over 5,000 workers at Reedisha Knitex factory staged a demonstration inside during their lunch break at 1pm; they demanded a pay rise to compensate for the rampant inflation of food and other essentials such as rent and transportation. Their demands being ignored by management, they set about ransacking the factory. This sparked a clash with factory officials, 15 of whom were injured.

By 2.30pm the workers had left the factory; they then blocked the main Dhaka-Mymensingh Highway for three hours. 300 Rapid Action Battalion (RAB) and police personnel arrived and requested the workers remove the blockade - the request was ignored. Security forces then asked the factory management to agree a wage increase but this request too was ignored. At

around 6pm the RAB and cops fired gunshots and teargas into the crowd and baton charged, injuring 50.

The Superintendent of Police, expressing typical police 'logic', declared; "We requested both the factory authorities and the workers but none of them gave any response. If the factory authorities responded, such an untoward incident would not have occurred" - i.e., 'if the bosses hadn't refused to grant a pay rise, we wouldn't have shot the workers'.

### **Employers threaten a general strike**

*'Security, security and security has become the biggest issue and challenge to the readymade garments industry,' said the BGMEA's president. (New Age, 15/8/08)*

RMG employers' federation the BGMEA has threatened to strike within the next week if the government does not begin to take effective measures against the continual costly worker vandalism in the industry. While still stalling on awarding any pay increases to workers, the BGMEA has expressed annoyance that its sister organisation, the BKMEA (representing knitwear manufacturers) has already agreed a 20% increase.

### **Military government relaxes ban on unions**

The ban on all trade union activity imposed in January 2007 by the incoming 'caretaker' military govt. under the Emergency Powers Rules is to be partially withdrawn. This is "*so that collective bargaining agents can hold their stalled elections...amid calls from local and global rights groups...*" This may be a dawning awareness that unions have a role to play in containing the potential of the present unrest in the garment industry and its damage to productivity - and also that the sweatshop image associated with the industry may be offputting to foreign buyers; "*Global rights groups in a recent conference in Dhaka stressed that workers should have the rights to association if the industries were to raise their productivity and gain a bigger access to export market.*" (New Age)

### **From the sidelines - unions condemn the violence**

Meanwhile the unions express their present lack of influence over workers' struggles by lamenting the violence;

Quote:

"The National Garment Workers Federation, a labour rights body of the garment factory workers, on Tuesday demanded increase of the minimum wage of the workers by 50% in view of the continuous price-hike of essentials, especially food items. [...]"

Referring to the recent worker's unrest in various garment factories in Savar and Gazipur, Amirul said it was nothing but the result of their desperation brought about by hunger and suffering.

### **He called on the workers to refrain from taking part in any destructive activities including damaging the factories."**

"Nazma Akter, president of Sammilito Garment Sramik Federation, a platform of garment factory workers, said the workers agitation broke out for a pay hike in the wake of higher prices of essential commodities.

She said although the majority of owners pay salaries under the current wage structure, the minimum wage of Tk 1,662.50 a month is too little to maintain livelihoods. "So, **it needs to**

**be increased through negotiations, but not by damaging factories,"** she added.

She said the government should also come forward to settle the issue of low salaries of the workers. "The workers, owners and government officials may sit together again for a solution," she said."

Nazma Akter and co clearly don't have as much influence over garment workers as they would like; they are far too violent and unruly for their liking. Trade Unions still have not established any dominant presence in the industry. Neither the state nor bosses are fully convinced of their permanent usefulness in controlling class struggle and have always denied any official union recognition in the vast majority of RMG workplaces - but Akter and co are working hard to convince them of their common interests and to show how useful they can be for the ruling class.



The absence of such professional mediators to take away direct control of struggle from workers is one definite strength of the RMG workers. Akter is a former textile worker who started factory work at 11 years old. But such 'credibility' should not blind us to the role of those who seek to lead struggles in a particular direction. The evidence shows that Akter and co are willing to act as typically opportunist union bureaucrats (happily, so far, Generals with few troops); in 2007 Akter joined an alliance of Bangladeshi union hacks and RMG employers at a United States Trade Representatives (USTR) hearing in Washington. The hearing debated a motion by the AFL-CIO to withdraw the US Generalised System of Preference (GSP) from Bangladesh (GSP is a preferential trade tariff for imports from 'developing countries'). The AFL-CIO accurately claimed what everyone knows - that Bangladesh does not allow labour rights in export processing zones (EPZs). *"In its petition, the AFL-CIO made four complaints that included violation of domestic and internationally recognised workers' rights in EPZs, violation of domestic labour laws and internationally recognised labour standard in readymade garments (RMG) industry, similar violations in shrimp and fish processing industries, and violent actions by government security forces against trade unionists, workers and labour rights groups."*

Arguing against the AFL-CIO, the Bangladeshi delegation agreed that the GSP gave little if any direct benefits to the country. But they said that GSP withdrawal would substantiate the AFL claims and so damage their volume of business with US buyers - who are increasingly sensitive about corporate image and unwelcome associations with 'sweatshop labour' etc. Akter claimed;

Quote:

If the US authorities want to empower global women, especially the Bangladeshi poor women, they should not consider the complaint lodged by the AFL-CIO, rather they should

continue the GSP facilities for Bangladesh," Nazma Akther, president of the Sammilito Garments Sramik Federation, told the journalists.

She said the AFL-CIO prepared the report on Bangladesh on the basis of a study conducted by its local representative Solidarity Centre Bangladesh, which has no knowledge about the labour rights situation here.

About 177 elected workers' welfare committees are actively working in the EPZs of Bangladesh, she said, adding that the association is also **not aware of any incidents of repression on workers in the industry**.

There are two agendas here - both in the pursuit of extending trade union representation and its role in the labour process, both seeking a 'fairer' more rational and stable form of exploitation of labour. The AFL-CIO pressures its government and the international business community to penalise those countries that won't let unions in - which is also a form of protectionism against those same countries who undermine US industries with cheaper imports based on cheaper labour. Conversely, the Bangladeshi union hacks seek accommodation in the labour process by showing employers that they understand and share the bosses' priorities of ensuring strong national productivity and competitiveness. They hope to convince employers that they can play a useful role in mediating conflict to deliver a more disciplined and efficient workforce; and so dissipate the immediate mass responses now typical of garment workers by channelling them into long drawn out bureaucratic procedures. And it was not only Akter and SGSF who blatantly denied to the world the real daily conditions of exploitation of garment workers;

Quote:

Labour leaders Salahuddin Shawpan, Selina Ahmed Tania, Jahanara Begaum, M Delwar Hossain, Sahidullah Badal, Sultana Khan, Rokya Sultana Anju and Md. Nurul Islam were present at the press conference among others.

Besides, Garments Tailors Workers League in a press statement yesterday also demanded continuation of the GSP facilities.[...]

leaders of RMG labour organisations yesterday urged the US government not to discontinue the GSP facility for Bangladesh just to satisfy the US-based labour rights group.

They said if the US government considers **the false and baseless petition** filed by the rights group, Bangladesh's RMG sector will face a massive setback, resulting in joblessness for female garment workers.

The union leaders and bosses achieved the retention of GSP.

Akter and the other 'labour leaders' (many - or most? - of whom are in fact middle class reformers and liberal professionals with no experience of factory work) or anyone who has any "*knowledge about the labour rights situation*" could hardly fail to be unaware that workers regularly suffer beatings, sexual abuse, starvation wages, police attacks and occasional murder in the RMG factories; her incredible lies in Washington that she is unaware of any worker repression - if ever spoken back home in the presence of the actual Bangladeshi workers she claims to represent - would have got the reception they deserve. At home she is happy to criticise both the conditions of workers - and their use of violence to improve those conditions.



## **A New Unionism?**

There is a minority section of the Bangladeshi upper classes that seeks an accommodation with trade unionism as a stabilising factor in industrial relations, as part of a wider reforming, modernisation and democratisation of the society. The potential appeal of these union leaders is that they might win and hold onto substantial gains and protections for workers and so institutionalise reforms - meaning, in Bangladesh, basic reforms such as wages above near-starvation levels and other conditions we take for granted and that garment workers would welcome. But in the present situation unions are made almost irrelevant both by the high level of self-organised class struggle - and by the stubbornness of the employers and the increasingly intense exploitation they feel the need to enforce to remain globally competitive. (The minimum wage agreed after the major revolt of 2006 - only patchily implemented by employers - has long been overtaken by inflation; making union-led negotiation seem even more irrelevant.)

But - irrelevant as they appear now; historical experience suggests that if these struggles ever develop towards working class insurrection - Bangladesh being one of very few countries at present with even a slight possibility of such a development - then the unions may, if necessary, be promoted to play a role of last line of defence for the ruling class; by functioning as a form of representation that steers struggles into a mere limited reform of workplace relations and perhaps some modest welfare measures. Things could change - but, judging by past experience and continued ruling class intransigence, it would probably take something close to a revolution to achieve even these basic reforms.

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<http://www.newagebd.com/2008/aug/25/front.html#17>

## **RMG workers stage sit-in for DA, wage commission**

Staff Correspondent

The Textile Garments Workers Federation demanded on Sunday that the interim government should ensure 50 per cent dearness allowance and form a wage commission for the garment workers by August 30.

If otherwise, they would go on for a mass hunger strike on August 31, threatened the Dhaka city unit leaders of

the federation at a two-hour sit-in at Asad Auditorium in Dhaka.

They also demanded that the government should start rationing food and other essential commodities at the garment factories before Ramadan.

The federation leaders apprehended that the Bangladesh Garments Manufacturers and Exporter's Association might create anarchy in the garment factories to delay the workers' right to trade unionism.

The military-controlled government imposed a ban on trade union activities after the state of emergency was declared on January 11, 2007, the leaders said.

They also criticised the BGMEA leaders for putting the blame of labour unrest in the garment industry on garment labour leaders.

The Workers Party of Bangladesh general secretary, Bimal Biswas, SKOP leader Shafiuddin Ahmed, student leader Asaduzzaman Khan Masum, Rafiqul Islam Sujon, youth leader Mostafa Alamgir Ratan expressed solidarity with the programme.

Labour leader Abul Hossain, Quamrul Ahsan, Lovely Yesmin, Zoinal Abedin and others spoke at the programme.

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<http://www.newagebd.com/2008/aug/26/front.html#17>

## **Jamaat man held for instigating labour unrest in Gazipur**

Our Correspondent . Gazipur

The police on Monday arrested Masiur Rahman, president of Gazipur sadar unit of Sramik Kalyan Federation, labourer unit of Jamaat-e-Islami Bangladesh, at Chandana under Gazipur sadar for allegedly instigating labour unrest in the area.

Another Ramzan Ali, who was with Masiur, was also caught for questioning.

The police said worker of Nightingale Fashion Garments of Konabari under sadar upazila ransacked the factory, demanding 20 per cent hike in their salary on Sunday.

Police said Masiur, along with others, instigated the labour unrest.

Humayan Kabir, manager of the factory, filed a case against 41 persons, including Masiur, accusing them of damaging assets worth Tk 50 lakh. The police on Sunday arrested 16 persons in connection with the case.

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<http://www.thedailystar.net/story.php?nid=52587>

Published On: 2008-08-31

Front Page

## **RMG workers clash with cops: 60 hurt**

*Highway blocked for 3 hours; police fire rubber bullets, teargas shells*

Staff Correspondent

Another round of violent clashes between garment workers and law enforcers in Gazipur and Savar left 60 more workers and 10 police injured yesterday.

In Savar several thousand workers of a garment factory of Biswas group poured out on Dhaka-Aricha highway at Rajfulbaria demanding two months' back pay, and kept the busy highway blocked for three hours leaving several thousand vehicles stranded.

Police had to fire around 30 rounds of teargas shells and over 100 rubber bullets in Konabari of Gazipur to quell the workers who were demonstrating against sacking of their co-workers from a factory of Standard Garments, and following a rumour about the death of another.

During the clashes raging garment workers smashed at least 20 vehicles in Savar and Konabari.

Police said several thousand workers of Standard Garments were observing an abstention from work and were demonstrating in front of the factory at noon against firing of their 18 colleagues on Friday.

A fierce battle between the workers and police erupted as the demonstrators barricaded Gazipur-Tangail road prompting police to try refraining them from halting traffic.

In another incident, workers of Diganta Sweater Factory in Naujor area of Gazipur Sadar went on a rampage in the afternoon following a rumour about one of their colleagues' death in the factory.

Police said the workers became furious as the rumour spread, and ransacked some machines and vehicles kept in front of the factory.

They also barricaded Gazipur-Tangail road for an hour and damaged around 10 vehicles.

As police rushed to the area to bring the situation under control a fierce clash broke out between the demonstrating workers and the law enforcers.

Officer-in-charge (OC) of Joydebpur Police Station Abdur Rashid said they fired around 30 teargas shells and 100 rounds of rubber bullets.

He also said 18 police including two sub-inspectors were injured from brickbats the workers were raining on them during the melee. The injured were treated in a local clinic.

The OC said they managed to bring the situation under control around 4:00pm.

Police, army, and Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) were later deployed in the areas to fend off further flare-ups.

Meanwhile, about 30 people were injured in a clash between police and workers of a garment factory of Biswas group in Savar after the workers blockaded the Dhaka-Aricha Highway for three hours demanding payment of two months' arrears.

The agitating workers damaged around 10 to 12 vehicles.

Several hundred vehicles remained stranded on both sides of the road due to the blockade.

Witnesses said about 8,000 workers gathered at the factory at around 1:00pm. They started vandalising the factory after receiving the news that the factory had been closed for a month.

Later, they took to the street and blockaded the Dhaka-Aricha Highway.

On information, police rushed to the spot and asked the workers to withdraw the blockade. But the workers paid no heed to them. Later, police charged baton on the workers, who pelted the law enforcers with brickbats.

The workers withdrew the blockade at around 4:30pm.

Later, Rab and army personnel held talks with the factory owners about the payment of workers' arrears.

Police said the factory workers had been staging demonstrations for the last few days demanding payment of arrears. Although the factory owners assured them of paying arrears on several occasions, they did not keep their words.

## **110 hurt as police, RMG workers clash at Savar, in Gazipur**

Staff Correspondent

At least 110 people were injured when the police charged at garment factory workers out on demonstrations with truncheons and teargas shells at Konabari in Gazipur and Savar in Dhaka on Saturday.

Scores of vehicles and factories were vandalised. The lawmen also fired gunshots to tackle the situation.

The workers blocked the Dhaka–Tangail Highway at Konabari and the Dhaka–Aricha Highway at Savar, suspending traffic for several hours. The New Age correspondent in Gazipur said more than 70 people, including 18 policemen, were injured in clashes between garment workers and the police at Konabari over termination of the job and arrest of some of garment workers.

Witnesses and the police said the workers of the Standard Garments at Konabari abstained from work and went out on demonstrations in front of the factory Friday afternoon in protest at the termination of the job their 18 fellows.

The authorities filed a case against 300 to 500 workers on Friday on charge of abstaining from work and going out on demonstrations. They also handed 28 workers over to the police on Saturday.

Several hundred workers took to the streets and went on the rampage.

They blocked the Dhaka–Tangail Highway. The workers damaged several vehicles and some machines kept in front of the factory.

The police, army and the Rapid Action Battalion tried to tackle the situation by firing teargas shells and gunshots. More than 50 people were injured.

The workers alleged that police fired 115 rounds of shotgun bullet and 50 rounds of teargas canisters to bring the situation under control.

Army troops, policemen and Rapid Action Battalion personnel were deployed to stave off further trouble.

The workers of the Diganta Sweater Factory at Naojor in the Gazipur district headquarters also went on rampage Sunday afternoon over rumours of the death of one of their fellows in the factory bathroom.

The police said the workers became furious as the rumours spread and they had vandalised some machines and vehicles in front of the factory. They also blocked the Gazipur–Tangail Highway and damaged 25 vehicles which included two police vans.

Army troops, policemen and Rapid Action Battalion personnel tried to control the situation by firing teargas shells and gunshots. More than 20 were injured in the incidents.

The workers said the police had fired gunshots and teargas shells to control the situation. A large number of lawmen were deployed to check against further trouble.

At least 40 people, including 10 female garment factory workers, were injured at Savar as the police charged at the factory workers with truncheons near the Rajphulbaria bus stand on Saturday.

Witnesses and the police said several hundred workers of the Biswas Garments Private Limited went out on demonstrations to push for the payment of their salary for two months in arrears. They blocked the Dhaka–Aricha Highway at about 1:30pm.

The Savar upazila nirbahi officer, Rabbi Mia, assistant superintendent of police Jahangir Alam, Savar police officer-in-charge Selim Sazzad, Ashulia police officer-in-charge Rafiqul Islam and Dhamrai police officer-in-charge

Tariqul Islam reached the place and tried to tackle the situation.

The factory authorities asked the workers to join work and said salaries would be paid in two days; but the workers did not accept the proposal.

The factory's deputy director, Mahmuda Begum, also the wife of the owner, later asked the workers to go inside the factory to receive the salary. The workers then withdrew the blockade.

As the workers failed to get the salaries, they went on the rampage and vandalised some vehicles stranded on the road.

The clash began as the police charged at them with truncheons. At least 40 workers were injured.

The Savar police officer-in-charge, Selim Sazzad, told New Age, 'Police deployment inside the factory was reinforced to stave off any trouble.'

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<http://www.theindependent-bd.com/printversion.php?nid=95845>

Posted: 31/08/2008 - 00:39

## **RMG workers, police clash for 3 hours**

*Two OCs of Tongi, Gazipur among 50 injured*

STAFF REPORTER



Garment workers clashed with policemen at Gazipur yesterday. —FocusBangla photo

At least 50 persons including the officers in charge (OCs) of Tongi and Gazipur Sadar Thana were seriously injured and 23 vehicles were damaged in a three-hour-long clash between the garments workers and police at Naojor and Konabari areas in Gazipur yesterday.

The clash ensued when nearly two hundred garments workers went on the rampage in those places adjacent to Dhaka-Tangail highway at around 3 pm over the rumour of

death of a female garments worker inside the factory of Diganta Sweater Ltd.

They were later joined by the workers of Standard Garments, who in the morning, held a protest meeting inside the factory demanding reinstatement of some workers, terminated recently.

After a while, rumour spread that a female garments worker, Renu Akhter, was killed inside the bathroom of the Diganta Sweater factory prompting the hundreds of garments workers of the factory to vandalise it.

Then they went out of the factory to the adjacent Dhaka-Tangail highway and soon were joined by hundreds others from the neighbouring Standard and other garments and went on the rampage.

During this time the highway was closed to traffic for three hours creating huge traffic congestion in the surrounding area.

The place turned into a battlefield when police tried to stop the unruly workers.

The workers started throwing brickbats targeting the police. They also damaged two police vehicles. The clash spread across two-kilometre area from Naojor to Chandina square.

During the chase and counter chase police lobbed several rounds of teargas shells and fired ten rounds of shots to disperse the workers.

The clash continued till the arrival of a heavy contingent of armed police, RAB led by the SP of Gazipur. After the arrival of large number of law enforcers, the workers were dispersed.

At around 4.30 pm, additional DIG of Dhaka Range Mozammel Hossain went to the residence of Renu Akhter, met her there and later informed that the news of Renu's death was totally false.

"She was pregnant and a bit weak physically and that is why she fell inside the bathroom of the factory," he told the reporters.

Managing Director of the factory Kamal Uddin told newsmen that a vested quarter spread the rumour of her death with a view to creating anarchy in the RMG sector. He informed that huge quantity of valuable equipment and raw materials was damaged by the unruly workers. The owners of the two garments factories declared general holiday following the incident.

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<http://www.thedailystar.net/story.php?nid=52947>

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Front Page

### **3 DEPZ factories shut over unrest fear**

Kailash Sarkar

Apprehending violence among workers, three garments factories owned by foreign investors at Dhaka Export Processing Zone (DEPZ) in Savar have been closed for indefinite periods in the last 15 days.

Sources noted that as Ramadan has begun, labour unrest might increase on eve of the Eid-ul-Fitr in demand for wages, bonus and other facilities.

Of the three factories, Indian-owned GB Garments was closed on Sunday.

Around 400 workers of the factory were carrying out agitations demanding eight-day Eid vacation instead of six-day now.

Earlier, Korean factory Softex Garments with 2,200 workers and Taiwan-owned A-One Garments having 3,500 workers were closed in the third week of last month for similar reasons.

Another factory -- Hope Lon (BD) Ltd -- was closed on August 24 for unrest among workers. It resumed production to days later following an understanding with the owners.

Around 20 garments factories at the DEPZ were closed for various periods following unrest among workers at different times in the last one year.

Meanwhile, 151 garments factories and related units out of 7,500 across the country witnessed labour unrest over the first eight months of this year.

Asked about closure of three factories now, Bangladesh Export Processing Zone Authority (BEPZA) General Manager AZM Azizur Rahman said, "Owners have closed the factories to keep those safe and avert any untoward incidents. Before doing so, they had informed us."

The general manager said, "Workers go for work stoppages and violent actions even on silly grounds. And owners are forced to close their factories to avert damage of valuables."

He went on, "We try to help resolve the problems concerning wages and other facilities of workers. But they appear reluctant to take our help."

He mentioned that there are 96 factories at the DEPZ. So, closure of two or three units would not affect overall production that much.

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<http://www.thedailystar.net/story.php?nid=53134>

Published On: 2008-09-03

Front Page

## **50 hurt as garment workers, police clash in Gazipur**

Staff Correspondent

Clashes between garment workers and police at Chowrasta in Gazipur left over 50 people wounded, 10 factories ransacked and Gazipur-Mymensingh and Gazipur-Tangail highways blocked for hours.

Six policemen including the officer-in-charge of the Gazipur Police Station are among those injured in the violence that began on death rumours.

Witnesses said police fired at least 30 rubber bullets and around 40 teargas shells during the nearly three-hour fight.

At around eight in the morning, three workers at Diganta Sweater Factory at Naojore near Chowrasta fell sick. They were taken to local hospital. They were released after some time as their condition improved.

But in the meantime rumours spread at the factory that the three had died. Incensed, their fellow workers swooped on the admin and security staffers. They went on the rampage, damaging machinery, furniture and other valuables.

Soon they came out on the road and asked workers at the other factories to join them. Failing to get a response, they started throwing brickbats at those factories.

When police moved to break up the agitation, the marauding workers resorted to stone throwing. The law enforcers responded with gunfire and teargas.

The demonstrators put up barricades on Gazipur-Tangail and Gazipur-Mymensingh highways, and damaged several vehicles.

They forced vehicular movement on the roads to be suspended for about three hours, causing long tailbacks, and sufferings to hundreds of inter-district bus passengers.

Superintendent of Police in Gazipur Mohammad Abdul Baten told The Daily Star, "The rumours were spread to incite the workers to violence."

He said, "I've had a meeting with the factory authorities and asked them to pay the dues and bonuses of the workers before the Eid."

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<http://priyo.com/news/20080903/12552/rumour-fuels-garments-unrest-50-hurt>

## **Rumour fuels garments unrest: 50 hurt**

September 3, 2008 - 5:01am BDT



At least 50 workers were injured yesterday as the workers of Diganta Sweater locked in clash with workers of other factories in the area for their refusal to join in the vandalism.

Garment workers went on the rampage and damaged at least 20 garment factories at Nawjor here following the rumour of the death of three employees in a factory.

Witnesses said hundreds of workers of Diganta Sweater took to the street at about 9:00am when the rumour spread that three of their colleagues were found dead in a bathroom of the factory.

The agitated workers blockaded Dhaka-Tangail Highway and Dhaka-Mymensingh Highway, disrupting traffic on the roads. This created a serious traffic jam in the area. They also ransacked some vehicles plying on the roads.

The law enforcers rushed to the scene to quell the violence.

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<http://www.newagebd.com/2008/sep/03/front.html#1>

## **RMG unrest leaves 50 injured**

### **Death rumour maddens workers, police fire shots, teargas shells**

Staff Correspondent

At least 50 people were injured as police clashed with several hundred garment workers blocking the Dhaka-Tangail and Dhaka-Mymensingh highways at Nawjor area of Sadar upazila in Gazipur Tuesday over rumoured deaths of fellows.

Demonstrators vandalised dozens of vehicles suspending traffic on the two inter-district highways for several hours.

At least 10 apparel factories were partially damaged during the pitched battle.

Police fired 90 rounds of shotgun bullets and 10 rounds of teargas canisters to disperse the agitators, who retaliated by throwing stones.

Office in-charge of Tongi police station Abdus Salam and three other lawmen were among the injured.

Critically injured 17 persons were admitted to different local hospitals.



Witnesses said a rumour had been in the air for last few days that some workers of Diganta Sweater Factory died in the factory toilet and the authority hid the bodies.

The rumour led to massive vandalism of the factory building and vehicles parked inside on Saturday.

As workers joined their work Tuesday, a worker of the factory sustained injuries in the toilet at the 4th floor of the factory at around 9:00 am.

The news further fuelled the rumour and created panic among the factory workers, leaving three — Mukti, Sabina and Wahedul — unconscious. They were admitted to nearby Sheba Hospital.

A fresh rumour that three workers died spread quickly, angering the fellows, who stopped working and started agitating inside and outside the factory.

But some hired goons, believed to be loyal to the owners and management of the factory equipped with rods, bamboo sticks, cricket stumps and hockey sticks attacked the agitating workers and severely beat them up.

Being chased and assaulted by the hired goons, the workers took to the street and went on rampage, blocking the Dhaka-Tangail highway at around 10:00 am.

The situation deteriorated when several hundred workers of the neighbouring factories expressed solidarity with the demonstrators and joined them in attacking the hired miscreants at around 10:45 am.

The furious workers vandalised stranded vehicles and furniture and office equipments pelting stones and brickbats while other groups continued to counter the assault of the hired goons.

Huge contingents of police, members of the Rapid Action Battalion and joint forces tried to disperse the agitators charging batons.

Police charged 10 rounds of teargas canisters and 90 rounds of shotgun bullets to bring the situation under control.

The angry workers then gathered at the Chandana Intersection and Vogra area and blocked the Dhaka-Tangail and Dhaka-Mymensingh highways and vandalised some factories, including Crown, Tex Knit, Duke, Euro Jeans, Label, Dotcom, Body fashion, Classic Composite and some business establishments.

At least 50 vehicles were damaged during the three-hour clash.

Law enforcers managed to clear the roads at about 2:00 pm and sent workers back to factories. Later they mediated a meeting between workers' representatives and the factory management.

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<http://www.newagebd.com/2008/sep/04/front.html#14>

## **RMG workers keep rallying in Gazipur, Savar**

Staff Correspondent

Garment factory workers in Gazipur and at Savar in Dhaka on Wednesday continued with work abstention and demonstrations and vandalised a factory, injuring four officials.

Witnesses and the police said the authorities of the Amotex Garments Factory, owned by the Standard Group, at Konabari in the Gazipur district headquarters suspended operation and announced layoff on Thursday amid labour unrest.

In protest at the layoff, several hundred workers of the neighbouring Titas Garments had abstained from work since Wednesday morning.

The workers also went out on demonstrations and chanted slogans against the authorities; some members of a worker's organisation joined hands with them.

The workers attacked the factory officials. Production manager Alamgir Hossain, 35, accountant Momen, 32, and workers Yakub, 35 and Chan Mia, 32, sustained injuries. The injured were admitted to hospital.

The workers took to the streets at about 12:15pm and brought out a procession and some workers of the neighbouring Asif Garments joined the workers out on demonstrations.

The police rushed to the place and charged at the workers with truncheons, in which more than 10 workers were injured.

The lawmen picked up 22 workers. They were released after an hour. The authorities later announced closure of the factory.

Workers of the Cosmos, Sweater Plus and Matrix had, meanwhile, abstained from work and gone out on demonstrations since Wednesday morning.

The workers took to the streets, but the police managed to disperse them.

The authorities of the Diganta Sweater, where more than 50 people on Tuesday sustained injuries in clashes triggered by the rumour of a ghost in the toilet and subsequent assumption of a death of a fellow, took steps to avoid the ghost panic.

The authorities arranged prayer session and recitation from the Qur'an at the factory on Wednesday. The factory will resume operation on Saturday.

The authorities of the Biswas Garments Limited at Savar announced closure of the factory for an indefinite period on Wednesday after labour unrest.

The workers had started work abstention to push for their demands including wage increase and festival and iftar allowances since Sunday.

The factory's general manager Faridur Rahman said, 'We have decided to suspend operation as directed by our owner, Mohiuddin Biwas.'

The workers of a Biswas Group sister concern on August 30 blocked the Dhaka-Aricha Road and clashed with the police in which 40 were injured.

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<http://www.newagebd.com/2008/sep/13/front.html#2>

## **'Ghost panic' sign of RMG workers' troubled psyche**

*Malnutrition, subhuman life and stress key reasons*

Nazrul Islam

The latest spate of vandalism in apparel factories, reportedly triggered by 'ghost panic', was nothing but the manifestation of the low-paid workers' troubled psyches caused by malnutrition and subhuman life in squalid slums, said factory insiders and psychologists.

Garment factory workers, mostly uneducated, were panicked by 'ghosts' and the rumoured death of colleagues, and rampaged through a number of factories in areas near Dhaka, vandalising factory properties and vehicles in recent weeks.

Recurrence of such incidents angered the factory owners, who termed the 'ghost panic' as part of a campaign of 'planned vandalism' meant to destroy the country's biggest export earning industry, and threatened to shut down their units from September 25 if any other factory was attacked.

They suspected that 'external forces' might have taken the opportunity offered by the panic to foment unrest in the garment sector, and wanted the government to ensure full security of the factories to save the industry that employs about two million people and earns 76 per cent of the country's export revenue.

However industry insiders, development actors and clinical psychologists, after investigating the recent incidents, said excessive stress in both workplaces and homes, malnutrition and superstition are responsible for the 'ghost phobia' that gripped a number of

apparel factories near Dhaka and led to a series of violent clashes.

Clinical psychologists and physicians termed the tendency 'collective obsessive behaviour' or 'mass sociogenic illness', which is sometimes seen in school-children, mainly girl students.

They suggested a stress-free work atmosphere, proper counselling, basic education, regular health check-ups and sufficient breaks during working hours to overcome a problem of this kind.

'The symptoms suggest that the problems have originated from anxiety. Workplace counselling and stress management are essential to overcome the problem since many factories have faced similar problems,' Mahmudur Rahman, chairman of the clinical physiology department at Dhaka University, told New Age.

He said factory-owners should ensure a healthy atmosphere for workers in the national interest.

The so-called 'ghost panic' in factories first surfaced after a section of workers vandalised Diganta Sweater's factory in Gazipur, following rumours of the deaths of a few workers as a result of 'ghost attack' in a toilet of the factory.

Production in the factory remained suspended for four days as workers went on a rampage, damaged factory property and blocked the roads for hours.

In May this year, vandalism triggered by ghost phobia forced a factory in the Chittagong Export Processing Zone to suspend production for two days.

At least 10 other garment factories have come under attack in the last two months in Gazipur alone after the spread of almost identical news or rumours that workers fainted in factory toilets and some of them even died.

The latest incident occurred at Pandora Sweater Factory on the Joydevpur road intersection on September 5, three days after workers vandalised Diganta Sweater and clashed with law enforcers in the same area.

Five workers of Diganta Sweater claimed that they saw 'witches' before they fainted inside factory's toilet. They were taken to a nearby clinic where physicians found that none of them had sustained any injury.

'They fainted because of weakness. I found that their blood pressure and heart beat was too low,' said Abdur Rahman, chairman of Sheba Diagnostic Hospital.

He said that all the patients were cured after initial medical treatment. The hospital and some 80 other clinics have become used to get patients with such symptoms in Gazipur which has a concentration of apparel factories.

He said his hospital treated, on an average, 100 garment factory workers suffering from anxiety-related illness every month.

'Poor garment workers suffer mainly from malnutrition and anxiety, which make them weak and vulnerable to nervous breakdown,' said Rahman.

He said the stories of ghosts were either fabricated or hallucinatory.

The production manager of a nearby garment factory echoed the physician.

'Most garment factory workers lead sad or stormy domestic lives, which affects their behaviour in workplaces,' Mohammad Hanif, who supervises about 3,000 workers at Shapla Garments, told New Age on Friday.

'They are too weak because they cannot manage to eat regular meals either because of time constraint or because they simply fail to make both ends meet with whatever wages they get after such strenuous labour in the factories,' said Hanif.

Most workers have to work for 10 to 14 hours a day and do not even get a chance to sit idle for a minute, he added.

Mukti Begum, 22, victim of a ghost scare who refused to be seen and only agreed to talk by mobile phone, said she fainted after seeing a corpse in the toilet of Diganta Sweater's factory. She could not remember anything afterwards and later regained consciousness at a hospital.

bed.

Mukta, born at Nasuria village of Atgharia upazila in Pabna district, used to work from dawn to dusk in the factory.

Another victim, 22-year-old Wahidul Islam of Chougachha in Jessore, said that he saw a shadow coming in and knocking him down when he was zipping up his trousers. He also fainted and was rushed to a hospital immediately.

Wahidul was later taken to a village ojha (witchdoctor) for exorcism, said Shahjahan Mia, his rickshaw-wallah father.

All these incidents put Kamal Uddin, managing director of the sweater factory, at a loss and prompted him to take steps to remove ghost phobia from workers, though he does not believe in ghosts.

In line with the workers' demands, he arranged a full-day recitation of the Qur'an in the factory's premises, started construction of a mosque there and buried amulets around the factory to keep 'evil spirits' at bay.

'I had no other way but to give in to the workers' demands to keep them calm,' said the factory's boss, who claimed that he had no problem with the workers over wages, leave and other privileges.

When he was asked whether there are any arrangements for healthcare in the factory if anyone suddenly gets sick while working, Kamal replied in the positive, saying that two doctors and two nurses were appointed for instant medical care of the workers whenever needed.

Factory workers said that two doctors and two nurses were not enough for the factory which has about 14,000 workers. Moreover, they are not available in the time of need, alleged the workers.

Arifa Akthar, coordinator of Karmajibi Nari, a non-governmental organisation looking after the garment factory workers' rights, said that the workers face tremendous mental and physical pressures both at home and workplaces. They live in dirty slums and work for 12-14 hours a day and remain half-fed as they have to save money to support their families, she added.

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<http://www.thedailystar.net/story.php?nid=54695>

Published On: 2008-09-14

Business

## **Weak trade unions fail to tackle unrest**

*Labour leaders say*

Refayet Ullah Mirdha

Dozens of trade unions in the readymade garment (RMG) sector are hardly in any position to resolve recurrent labour unrests, as they have no control over workers at factory level due to inactivity of most workers' unions, observed trade union leaders.

According to some leaders, at present there are more than 28 registered trade unions and more than 13 unregistered trade unions in the RMG sector.

Of the 200 registered workers' union units at factory level, only 15 or so are active, the trade union leaders claimed.

As a result, the central trade union leaders do not have any proper means of intervention in the wake of any labour unrest, although the leaders are meant to play a major role in resolving labour unrest.

During the recent incidents of unrest, garment workers attacked many factories, but the trade union leaders could not communicate with the workers due to the absence of active workers' union units.

Moreover, a ban was imposed on trade unionism since the declaration of state of emergency last year. However, the government relaxed such trade unionism embargo from industries, commercial enterprises and ports on September 7.

In line with trade union rules, leaders have an obligation to appease workers through realisation of their rights after negotiations with the factory owners concerned.

"We know we have a lot of responsibilities in the wake of any unrest in the industrial sector. But, sometimes we feel helpless as we have no control over the workers," said Amirul Haque Amin, secretary general of the National Garment Workers Federation (NGWF).

He identified two main factors behind the failure of the labour leaders in properly handling the severe RMG labour unrest, firstly, the absence of effective factory level units of workers' unions, and secondly, difficulty to unite so many trade unions under one umbrella.

Quamrul Ahsan, secretary of the Bangladesh Garment Sramik Karmachari Federation, pointed to the fact that leadership has not emerged among workers at factory level because trade unionism in the form of workers' union are limited for various reasons.

"When any unrest occurs at any factory, all workers try to take up the leadership on the negotiation table, which, most of the time, leads to disputes being unresolved," he went on.

He said that the number of trade unions, registered and unregistered, is now more than it is needed.

"We tried to bring all such trade unions, operating in the garment sector, under one umbrella,"



**A file photo shows garment workers agitating to press home their demands. Dozens of trade unions in the country's readymade garment sector can hardly resolve labour unrests, as they have no control over workers at factory level due to inactivity of most workers' unions, according to trade union leaders. Photo: STAR**

Quamrul said, adding that the initiative ended up in failure due to lack of harmony among the union leaders.

President of Bangladesh Knitwear Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BKMEA) Fazlul Hoque said surely some factories do not have any workers' union.

"There is no hard and fast rule for forming a union at factory level. If the workers want to form a union at factory level they can do it," he said.

"We, the owners, always appreciate constructive roles of the trade unions," Hoque said.

He urged the trade union leaders to be more responsible in the wake of any labour unrest as they are an integral part in the production process.

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<http://libcom.org/news/bangladesh-militarized-factory-visions-devouring-demons-capital-15092008>

## **Bangladesh; in the militarized factory - visions of the devouring demons of capital**

September 15th, 2008 by Ret Marut



Notes from the recent wave of struggles in the Bangladesh garment industry - there are ghosts in the machine...

In the wake of widespread strikes, riots and property destruction by garment workers the employers' federation BGMEA has repeatedly been demanding the government bring in harsher security measures. As their losses run into millions of dollars, the BGMEA has threatened an employers strike if security is not tightened. So now, in the worst affected areas, garment factories are under military occupation, with a permanent presence of huge numbers of police and paramilitary forces deployed to keep workers in the workplace and to force them to do unpaid overtime. This prevents workers leaving when disputes arise and, as normally happens, going to other factories to call out fellow workers.

Many workers are more malnourished than ever, as rampant food price inflation continues and garment bosses still refuse to pay a living wage. Factory bosses have officially agreed to sell staple foods to workers at subsidised prices in order to maintain a functioning labour power - but garment unions report that in practice the food is only on sale during working hours, making it unavailable to most workers. Identity cards are also required to purchase the

cheap food - and 50% of factories have failed in the legal requirement of issuing them, as ID cards make it easier for workers to claim owed back-pay.

The ready made garment (RMG) industry imposes ever-harder exploitation to maintain global competitiveness; its advantage of cheaper labour can be offset by competitors' greater technological investment delivering higher productivity. So, to maintain its advantage, Bangladeshi capital often works its labour power to exhaustion. Focussing on the cheaper, less skilled end of the market, and with low start-up costs, it is possible for some Dickensian-type capitalists to fulfill a large RMG order by working the labour force to the limit; 10 to 14 hour days are normal for a workforce that is 90% female and from as young as 12 years old - back wages are often not paid, the workers are dismissed - then the whole process starts again.

### ***The "Ghost Panic"***

Workers' malnutrition has become so widespread that some are now reported to be hallucinating in a delirious state during long shifts. A wave of mass hysteria is said to have spread through RMG factories where workers report ghost attacks - hallucinatory experiences based on the symbolism of the prevailing religious and cultural beliefs and superstitions. Psychologists have labelled the 'ghost panic' as 'collective obsessive behaviour' or 'mass sociogenic illness' and attributed it to stress, overwork and malnutrition.

Quote:

The so-called 'ghost panic' in factories first surfaced after a section of workers vandalised Diganta Sweater's factory in Gazipur, following rumours of the deaths of a few workers as a result of 'ghost attack' in a toilet of the factory. Production in the factory remained suspended for four days as workers went on a rampage, damaged factory property and blocked the roads for hours.

In May this year, vandalism triggered by ghost phobia forced a factory in the Chittagong Export Processing Zone to suspend production for two days. At least 10 other garment factories have come under attack in the last two months in Gazipur alone after the spread of almost identical news or rumours that workers fainted in factory toilets and some of them even died.

The latest incident occurred at Pandora Sweater Factory on the Joydevpur road intersection on September 5, three days after workers vandalised Diganta Sweater and clashed with law enforcers in the same area.

Five workers of Diganta Sweater claimed that they saw 'witches' before they fainted inside factory's toilet. They were taken to a nearby clinic where physicians found that none of them had sustained any injury.

'They fainted because of weakness. I found that their blood pressure and heart beat was too low,' said Abdur Rahman, chairman of Sheba Diagnostic Hospital. He said that all the patients were cured after initial medical treatment. The hospital and some 80 other clinics have become used to get patients with such symptoms in Gazipur which has a concentration of apparel factories.

He said his hospital treated, on an average, 100 garment factory workers suffering from anxiety-related illness every month. 'Poor garment workers suffer mainly from malnutrition and anxiety, which make them weak and vulnerable to nervous

breakdown,' said Rahman.

He said the stories of ghosts were either fabricated or hallucinatory. (New Age, Sep 13 08)

In at least one factory a religious exorcism rite has been performed.

One explanation of the 'ghost panic' may lie in the fact that so many reports place the 'sighting' of the apparition in the factory toilets. In the present climate of intense class conflict a worker is surrounded by openly hostile forces in the factory - and only protected by the solidarity and presence of fellow workers. Exhausted and malnourished, they feel the threatening presence around them even when alone in the toilet - leading to paranoid hallucinations. Also, the toilet is where many actual attacks on workers by factory management and security staff have occurred, so the feelings of vulnerability and paranoia are not without reason.

While RMG workers' working and living conditions are undoubtedly bad enough to destroy workers' health, it is hard to gauge the wider truth of these strange events - what may have been true in some factories may have then spread as a running joke among workers (and been swallowed whole by gullible media and doctors always on the lookout for a new phenomena to categorise); an ironic excuse from striking workers smashing up bosses' workplaces - 'It's not our fault - you've driven us mad!'.



### ***Unions admit 'no control'***

Quote:

Dozens of trade unions in the readymade garment (RMG) sector are hardly in any position to resolve recurrent labour unrests, as they have no control over workers at factory level due to inactivity of most workers' unions, observed trade union leaders. According to some leaders, at present there are more than 28 registered trade unions and more than 13 unregistered trade unions in the RMG sector.

Of the 200 registered workers' union units at factory level, only 15 or so are active, the trade union leaders claimed.

As a result, the central trade union leaders do not have any proper means of intervention in the wake of any labour unrest, although the leaders are meant to play a major role in resolving labour unrest.

During the recent incidents of unrest, garment workers attacked many factories, but the trade union leaders could not communicate with the workers due to the absence of active workers' union units.

[...]



"We know we have a lot of responsibilities in the wake of any unrest in the industrial sector. But, sometimes we feel helpless as we have no control over the workers," said Amirul Haque Amin, secretary general of the National Garment Workers Federation (NGWF). (Daily Star, Sep 14 08)

It is embarrassing for the garment worker unions to have to admit their lack of control over the workforce they officially claim to represent. It is a plea to garment bosses and government to allow a greater role for unions in industrial relations as a restraining influence on workers' combativity. But the majority of the Bangladeshi ruling class so far remains unconvinced that unions can be an asset to them, though a liberal minority can see their potential value as a stabilising influence. (The eagerness of these self-appointed union 'leaders' to always speak in the name of workers who have little interest in them was previously described in our earlier report.) Since the present wave of troubles began, the Government has relaxed some of its restrictions on union activity.

A union leader expresses a typical unionist view that workers are incapable of leading their own struggles and need specialist representatives to negotiate for them;

Quote:

Quamrul Ahsan, secretary of the Bangladesh Garment Sramik Karmachari Federation, pointed to the fact that leadership has not emerged among workers at factory level because trade unionism in the form of workers' union are limited for various reasons.

"When any unrest occurs at any factory, all workers try to take up the leadership on the negotiation table, which, most of the time, leads to disputes being unresolved," he went on.

***"We didn't have enough food before Ramadan anyway. For us, it's the same," ... "For the poor, it's always Ramadan."***

One wonders just where this situation will lead - Ramadan (a period of dawn to dusk religious fasting and abstinence) ends in a few days and people will pour out into the streets, and this has previously been a spark for outbreaks of rioting. So far, the RMG industry, the most important sector of the Bangladeshi economy, has not been seriously hit by the effects of the emerging global recession; although the workers unrest has cost millions in property damage and production stoppages, orders are still reported to be at a high level. Maybe sellers of cheap goods will ride the downturn better than at the higher end of the market. But when, inevitably, the recession starts to bite, one wonders what room is left - short of imposing actual slavery - for any further austerity measures to inflict on garment workers. Certainly, a situation of militarised factories inhabited by malnourished, half starving wage slaves worked to exhaustion - yet still bravely maintaining a high level of autonomous class struggle outside of any union control - is both a grim reminder (for Westerners) of the underside of modern global consumer capitalism and also a pointer to where some of its possible weaknesses lie.

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<http://www.thedailystar.net/story.php?nid=54980>

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Business

**Gazipur RMG units go back to production**  
***Owners upbeat on achieving export targets***

Refayet Ullah Mirdha

The Gazipur based garment factory owners, some of whom were affected by the month-long labour unrest in August, are now upbeat on fulfilling this year's export target of their produces, expressing their satisfaction over the government measures to keep law and order situation under control.

However, the industry insiders have linked the political stability and smooth supply of gas and power to such achievement.

According to them, normalcy returned in Gazipur and adjacent areas like Maona and Savar, where 60 percent of the country's garment factories are located, as the unrest-hit factories have started production on the strict security measures taken by the government in association with the sector's trade body leaders.

Meanwhile, in a bid to further stabilise the law and order, garments owners attended a crucial meeting at the Deputy Commissioner's office in Gazipur yesterday where representatives from Police, Rapid Action Battalion (RAB) and other law enforcement agencies reviewed the latest law and order in the area.

Earlier, these factory owners threatened to close their units in the trouble-torn district for an indefinite period from the 25th of this month if the government fails to provide security for the industry within this stipulated time.

Most of the garment factory owners have expressed their hope that they will be able to make up for the loss they faced because of the latest spell of labour unrest.

They think the rate of inflow of orders from foreign buyers is still very high when the country can manufacture fine clothing with cheaper labour cost.

At the beginning of the year almost all garment owners expected to surpass the export target, but the unrest hindered production, said Salam Murshedy, managing director of the Envoy Group.

This group stopped production at its sweater factory for a few days in the first week of August when a section of agitated workers vandalised some factories at Ashulia demanding hike of their wages.

"Though it will be tough, we are optimistic of reaching our targeted export of US\$100 million this calendar year. Our export was \$90 million in 2007," said Murshedy.

Lauding the government's step for appeasing the unrest in the garment sector, which accounts for more than three quarters of the total exports, he said stable law and order situation, political stability and proper supply of energy are the main factors for achieving the target.



**Workers are busy manning machines at a garment factory. Gazipur-based garment factory owners are upbeat on fulfilling this year's export target.**

"The amount of loss we faced for the labour unrest will stand at Tk 15crore. But I am confident that I can recover the loss as the production started again," said Mizanur Rahman Chowdhury, managing director of Mim Sweater, the factory that was burnt by its workers during the August 10 unrest.

"I exported US\$15 million in 2007 and for this year my target of export is \$18million," the confident Chowdhury maintained.

Echoing Chowdhury's optimism about RMG exports, Rezaul Hasanat, managing director of Viyellatex Group, a state-of-the art garment factory in Gazipur, also pointed to the fact that the work stoppage during the unrest would cost the production more.

"But the fulfillment of export target is possible under the current congenial business atmosphere," he said. The total turnover of Viyellatex Group was \$125 million in 2007 and this year the target is \$135 million and it is possible to achieve, he added.

Iqbal Ahmed Quereshi Adnan, managing director of Titas Sweater, an affected garment, said anticipating Titas' failure to timely deliver the export of sweater during the labour unrest, a major buyer from Spain cancelled his purchase order for 4 lakh pieces.

"But I am very optimistic about the achievement of export target of \$7million this year, which was \$6.5million last year," he said, adding that the cost doubles when exporters have to make air shipment to maintain the lead-time.

When asked, Vice President of Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA) Shahidul Islam said the situation seems normal, which is a pre-requisite to achieving export target.

"Stable law and order is a must for the recovery of the loss," he said.

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<http://www.thedailystar.net/story.php?nid=55118>

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Business

Column - Syed Nasim Manzur

**Wanted for RMG industry: Ghost busters**

Like most people whenever I hear talk of “conspiracy theories” I disregard the rest as it has become the most used and abused excuse for all our ills, be they political, social or economic. Exhorting the people to resist the evil designs of “foreign powers or aliens” has been the most popular diversionary tactic used by our leaders. I confess therefore that I have always been highly sceptical about the conspiracy theories floated by our garments industry from time to time as an explanation for the random and increasingly frequent violence plaguing their industry. But the



specific events of Diganta Sweaters that occurred a few weeks ago have changed my point of view. I watched at great length the innumerable news reports and talk shows that day and read also many of the newspaper reports on the same.

The “facts” are, as they emerged:

- \*The factory employs several thousand workers producing sweaters for export in a huge multi storied factory complex in Gazipur.

- \*The company seemed to be quite well regarded by the workers as a fair and good employer, with no issues regarding nonpayment of wages, bonuses and overtime, which are the most common roots of discontent in such factories.

- \*The trouble started when rumours started that a particular bathroom on the fifth floor was haunted and some unnamed workers had been seen to enter the same in good health and emerge mauled and bloodied. One or more of these victims were rumoured to have actually died as a result and it was alleged that the management then smuggled out the bodies in gunny bags to avoid detection. Some eagle-eyed workers had spotted this and immediately went up the battle cry of “return us the bodies”.

- \*Another woman worker described how she had witnessed two bodies “floating” out of the same bathroom and then had herself fainted, to a TV channel.

Net result: Ten factories in that area attacked and damaged over a 48 hour period, 100 people injured including police, cars burnt, roads blockaded and four factories closed down. I watched in disbelief, as the senior police officer on the spot described his inability to “apprehend these spirit” on live prime time TV.

Finally when on a live call in TV show, a viewer advised the senior BGMEA leader to engage an exorcist and bring to justice those evil conspirators that had released these spirits in the first place, I had to ask: have we lost all rationality and sanity?

Why was there not a single attempt by the police, local administration or even the factory to take a TV crew into that bathroom and actually disprove these claims? Even a layman such as I could see from the wildly contradictory and inconsistent stories by “witnesses” that reason had left the building and mob hysteria ruled the day.

The industry leaders have repeatedly claimed that they have evidence of “outside” interests including foreigners, NGOs, fake trade union activists provoking such anarchy. They have also claimed that the government intelligence agencies have identified these agent provocateurs but are not acting. The workers have claimed that they have evidence that their co-workers have been assaulted and even killed.

What is preventing the government to conduct a proper and credible investigation of such incidents and then announce the findings to the public, workers, management and local authorities?

We all condemn the few irresponsible and exploitative garment factory owners but we must also laud the majority of hard working entrepreneurs who have transformed Bangladesh. Beyond the statistics (76 percent of our export earnings, two million directly employed, 80 percent women) are the intangibles: how they have helped put Bangladesh on the map, how “Made in Bangladesh” has replaced “Aid for Bangladesh”, how they have brought millions of young women into the workplace, how they have generated an entire ecosystem of support industries such as packaging and labels, how they have created new consumers for local industries such as cosmetics and cell phones. The multiplier effects of this industry are too numerous to list but my favourite is a small bazaar store in Shafipur Bazaar that makes “compliance signs”.

So then why does this industry still suffer tragedies such as Diganta? I believe the first reason is the too big too fast syndrome where some factories have boosted production capacity rapidly without growing requisite managerial capacity. They have not developed the systems to effectively manage the huge number of people they suddenly employ. The HR function has been simply get more workers and if they leave, get more. In this race to get hands not enough attention is given to the heads and the hearts. Many of these factories started as small unit where there was a direct link between owner and factory, often a shared history. As the factories have grown that link has been broken and owners have become isolated from the shop floor and completely dependent on line managers. But that cannot and should not be an excuse for anarchy and violence.

Which brings us to the second reason. Suffice it to say the next time you see a factory being vandalized on TV, look a little closer and ask yourselves: do those rioters all look like factory workers and would they really destroy their source of livelihood?

Maybe then we can all help exorcise these evil spirits.

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<http://www.bangladeshnews.com.bd/2008/09/29/rmg-workers-block-dhaka-sylhet-highway-clash-with-cops/>

## **RMG workers block Dhaka-Sylhet highway, clash with cops**

Posted on Monday, September 29th, 2008 at 2:01 am

A few thousand garment workers yesterday clashed with police and barricaded Dhaka-Sylhet Highway at Kanchpur for over three hours causing untold sufferings to people heading home for Eid holidays.

The workers of Joya Garments at Kanchpur also set fire to a police pickup van during the clash that left at least 35 people, including 10 policemen, injured.

Several hundred vehicles were stuck in queues well over seven kilometres long due to the barricaded highway.

Earlier, the workers staged demonstration inside their factory demanding their wages and festival bonuses. They first clashed with factory staffers and then attacked the Ansar camp inside the factory. At one stage, they took to the highway.

Witnesses said around 3,000 workers of the factory barricaded the highway around 3:00pm.

Police charged truncheons to disperse the workers after failing to convince them to remove the barricade.

When police charged truncheons on the workers, the workers became more violent and vandalised at least 15 vehicles and set fire to the police pick-up van of Rupganj Police Station. They also pelted police with brickbats.

The police took shelter inside a neighbouring factory which was also damaged by the workers of Joya Garments.

Witnesses said during the clash and demonstration, the workers chanted slogans against the garment authorities.

Additional police from Dhaka reinforced the policemen in clash with the workers and forced them to leave the spot. They reopened the highway for traffic.

A number of Joya Garments employees yesterday said the factory was scheduled to pay their 20 days' salary for this month and the festival bonus. But the authorities told them that they would pay workers only half of their salaries and bonuses.

They alleged that police favouring the factory authorities attacked them.

Sources said senior police officials had a meeting with the garment authorities who assured them that the workers would get full payment.

Joya Garments Production Manager Abul Kalam said the authorities already started paying the workers in full in the evening.