Star BUSINESS

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Dubai's poor work condition draws fresh criticism

AFP, *Dubai*

A deadly blaze in a tower under construction in Dubai this month renewed concerns about the safety of foreign workers amid a spate of allegations by rights groups over labour abuses.

Police put the death toll at two but hospital sources said four foreign labourers died and 57 were injured in a fire on January 18 which broke out in the top floors of the 34-storey Fortune Tower, one of scores of sprawling towers being built in the desert emirate.

Like hundreds of thousands of labourers who work in the United Arab Emirates, most of the workers on the site were Asian nationals, including Indians, Bangladeshis and Chinese.

Images of terrified workers hanging from the windows of the smoke-engulfed top floors of the building covered the front pages of local dailies with witness accounts of labourers falling from high floors.

"I saw at least two people jump. Some of them (workers) were climbing out of the windows and sliding down the metal poles, and half-way down they would let go because it was burning their hands," Emirates Today quoted a foreman at the site as saying.

The incident led Hadi Ghaemi from New York-based Human Rights Watch (HRW) to question the safety measures taken on the construction site of the Fortune Tower.

"The safety record (for workers) in the United Arab Emirates is very much an issue of concern. This accident shows the need for (tight) measures to be implemented," Ghaemi said.

Most of the injured workers suffered smoke inhalation and burns and have since been discharged, except for a few who were still recovering in the government's Rashed Hospital.

Mohammad Abdullah, a 22-year-old Bangladeshi painter who was still recovering from smoke inhalation, recalled only seeing smoke sweeping through the 25th floor where he was working, and lights going off, before he fell unconscious.

Coughing repeatedly, Mohammad, who spoke through a translating nurse, said he had never received any safety instructions before working in the tower.

Anger over labour practices and work conditions prompted 2,500 labourers to riot last March at the construction site of Burj Dubai, set to be the world's tallest skyscraper. Some destroyed vehicles and equipment.

The riot prompted the New York-based Human Rights Watch (HRW) to call on the government to "end abusive labour practices" and describe labour conditions as "less than human".

Dubai ruler Sheikh Mohammad bin Rashed al-Maktoum, who is vice president of the UAE, last November ordered sweeping measures to protect foreign labourers.

But for HRW, the safety of foreign workers -- who have been powering the UAE's construction frenzy -- is a matter of enforcing existing regulations.

The rights watchdog said that the government had promised in September to increase the number of inspectors to 1,000 within 18 months.

"They have always promised to increase the number" of inspectors, said Ghaemi.

The latest incident prompted the head of Dubai's Civil Defence department to urge contractors to train workers on safety measures.

"Labourers need to know how to use their equipment safely," Brigadier Rashed Thani al-Matroushi was quoted as saying in the local press.

"Labourers are poor people, not educated enough to know how to respond to these situations," he said, referring to the majority of low-wage labourers.

HRW's report said that most of the UAE's 500,000 migrant construction workers come from South Asian countries, while the total migrant worker population is 2,738,000, or 95 percent of the workforce.

But HRW fears that the larger issue is that many fatalities are not reported by employers as work incidents.

"Numbers of the dead people are shrouded in mystery," Ghaemi said, claiming that "companies are not reporting (incidents) as required by law," and that the government is not able to distinguish between on-site deaths and other cases.

The embassies of India, Pakistan and Bangladesh repatriated the bodies of 880 construction workers in 2004, the HRW report said, adding that the government can account for only a few of these deaths "primarily because it appears not to enforce its own laws requiring employers to report worksite deaths and injuries".

PHOTO: **EASTLAND INSURANCE**

Mahbubur Rahman (3-R), chairman of Eastland Insurance Company Ltd, speaks at the Regional/ Branch Managers' Conference 2007 of the company on Saturday in Gazipur. Moazzem Hossain (2-L), and Mohd Arshad Ali (3-L), directors, and M Azmal Hoque (2-R), managing director, among other senior officials, are seen.

PHOTO: **SOCIAL INVESTMENT BANK**

Bashundhara Group and Social Investment Bank Ltd recently took a programme jointly in Manikganj to provide treatment for the patients suffering from cataract and low vision, cleft lip and cleft palate, and acid burning. Vice Chairman of Bashundhara Group Mahbub Morshed Hasan, Chairman of the bank Rezaul Haque and senior officials of both the companies, among others, were present at the programme.

CURRENCY

Following is Monday's (January 29, 2007) foreign exchange rate statement by **Standard Chartered Bank**

Major currency exchange rates

	BC Sell	TT Buy
US dollar	69.60	68.25
Euro	91.22	86.56
Pound	137.87	132.02
Australian dollar	55.24	51.41
Japanese yen	0.58	0.56
Swiss franc	56.37	53.35
Swedish kroner	10.32	9.30
Canadian dollar	59.93	57.23
Hong Kong dollar	8.93	8.72
Singapore dollar	46.20	44.16
UAE dirham	19.11	18.43
Saudi riyal	18.71	18.05
Danish kroner	12.59	11.33
Kuwaiti dinar	237.30	234.39

* All currencies are quoted against BDT

* Rates may vary based on nature of transaction

Exchange rate of some currencies

	Per USD	BDT per Currency
Indian rupee	44.17	1.56
Pak rupee	60.73	1.13
Lankan rupee	108.55	0.63
Thai baht	33.50	2.06
Malaysian ringgit	3.50	19.67

USD forward rate against BDT

	Buy	Sell
1 M	68.30	69.65
2 M	68.42	69.76
3 M	68.56	69.94
6 M	68.74	70.53

Local Market

FX: Local inter-bank FX market was active on Monday as the international markets opened for the week. The demand for USD remained stable, and the volume of cross currency transactions was more compared to yesterday. The USD rose slightly against the Bangladeshi taka.

Money Market

Money market was active on Monday. Call money rate remained unchanged and ranged between 6.50 and 7.00 percent.

International Market

The dollar scaled a four-year high against the yen on Monday, supported by said US economic data that helped persuade investors that the Federal Reserve may not cut interest rates this year. Stronger than expected December US durable goods orders and new home sales released on Friday were the latest in a series of robust figures that have convinced investors the world's biggest economy can avoid a hard landing and may not need a growth-boosting rate cut from the current 5.25 percent.

SHIPPING

Chittagong Port

Berthing position and performance of vessels as on 29/1/2007

Berth no.	Name of vessels	Cargo	L. Port call	Local agent	Dt of arrival	Leaving	Import disch
J/1	Hpaan	GI	Yang	MTA	24/1	31/1	409
J/2	Zenovia	Wheat(P)	Novo	Mutual	19/1	10/2	2585
J/3	Eid-A-Mostafa	GI	P. Band	Cla	23/1	2/2	1341
J/4	Hun Jiang	GI	Xing	Cosco	21/1	30/1	1807
J/5	Cheng Yun	TSP	Chin	Cosco	24/1	31/1	2046
J/6+5	Jin Ping	GI(Y. Peas)	Vanc	Litmond	14/1	2/2	2043
J/7	Komsomolets Sakhalia	Urea(Bcic)	Sing	Seacom	22/1	2/2	600
J/8	Ju Yong Guang	GI(S. Ash/S.Sulp)	Xing	Cosco	23/1	30/1	1966
J/9	Markovo	Urea(Bcic)	Long	PSL	18/1	1/2	806
J/11	Kota Rakayet	Cont	Sing	Pil(Bd)	21/1	1/2	215
J/12	Sea Master One	Cont	Sing	PML	27/1	1/2	--
J/13	Kota Rukun	Cont	Sing	Pil(Bd)	21/1	31/1	388
CCT/1	Rio Lawrence	Cont	Ptp	QCSL	17/1	29/1	233

Vessels due at outer anchorage

Name of vessels	Date of arrival	L. Port call	Local agent	Type of cargo	Loading ports
Athos	30/1	Vanc	Rainbow	GI(Y. Peas)	--
Champion Vincita	29/1	Hald	Rsship	Scraping	--
Yongxing	29/1	Col	PSSL	Cont	Col
Yong Jiang	29/1	Tianjin	Cosco	GI	--
Pac Palawan	30/1	Sing	CEL	Cont	Sing
Hoang Son	30/1	Yang	Gla	(Log)	1574(Y. Ma)
Privat-4	31/1	--	A&I	Scraping	--
Amarel	30/1	Vladi	Intraport	Scraping	--
Komodo	30/1	Brintaci	Bashund	C. Clink	4000 Ctg
Atlantic	31/1	Fuqi	OTL	Scraping	--
Banga Borti	31/1	Sing	Baridhi	Cont	Sing
Oel Fenterprise	31/1	Col	PSSL	Cont	Col
Oel Freedom	31/1	Ptp	PSSL	Cont	Sing

Tanker due

Overseas Primar	29/1	Kuwa	MSTPL	HSD/Ms	--
Sardegna	1/2	Braz	USL	CDSO	14500 W/Lt
Ha Wauan Star	4/2	Rast	DSL	C. Oil	--

Vessels at Kutubdia

Name of vessels	Cargo	Last Port call	Local agent	Date of arrival
Outside Port Limit				
Wira Keris	--	--	IBSA	R/A(4/1)
Pacific Champion	Pro. Equip	--	IBSA	R/A(25//1)
Sea Drill-6	Pro. Equip	--	IBSA	8/1
Gulf Dril-9	Pro. Equip	--	IBSA	3/1
Pacific Steel	--	--	IBSA	R/A(20/1)
Vessels at outer anchorage				
Vessels ready				
Banga Borat	Cont	Sing	Bdship	22/1
Martha Russ	Cont	Sing	QCSL	22/1
Dali	Cont	Col	Seacon	23/1
Banga Lanka	Cont	Sing	Bdship	24/1
Eagle Pioneer	Cont	Sing	CT	25/1
Banga Borak	Cont	P.Kel	Baridhi	25/1

The above are the shipping position and performance of vessels at Chittagong Port as per berthing sheet of CPA supplied by **Family,** Dhaka..

STOCK