

Australian retailers face new Bangladesh sweatshop claims

Workers who create clothes for Coles, Target, Kmart and Rivers claim they suffer long hours, low pay and abuse threats

THE GUARDIAN

Australian retailers who recently signed an agreement to improve worker conditions in Bangladesh are facing new claims that sweatshop workers in the country have suffered physical and verbal abuse.

In an investigation aired by ABC's Four Corners on Monday night, Bangladeshi workers who create clothes for Coles, Target, Kmart and Rivers claim to be forced to work long hours for little pay, with threats of abuse if they miss deadlines.

Shahanas, who earns \$3 a day as an employee at Dhaka business Eve Dress Shirts which supplies clothing to retail brand Rivers, told Four Corners: "The system is, how many pieces I have delivered in an hour? If I can't meet it, the abusive language starts.

"They slap us on the face, on the head and on the back."

The allegations of abuse come

just weeks after two of the brands linked to the allegations of sweatshop abuse by suppliers -- Kmart and Target -- signed a pledge to safeguard workers' safety in the wake of the Rana Plaza collapse, which killed more than 1,100 people.

Earlier this month, Kmart said that only suppliers that met its "strict standards for safety and social compliance" would be awarded business from the retail chain.

However several Australian businesses are yet to sign the Accord on Fire and Building Safety, which allows employees to refuse to work in unsafe conditions and mandates independent inspections of work sites. More than 50 international brands have agreed to the conditions, set out by global union IndustriALL.

A spokesperson for Big W, which had yet to sign the agreement, told Guardian Australia: "Our intention is to sign it, but we

are still waiting on details on how it will work. We are in contact with IndustriALL about how it will be rolled out and run."

Just Group, which owns Just Jeans, Peter Alexander and Portmans, refused to comment on the situation but it is understood it has not signed the accord. Best and Less, which has also declined to sign the accord, did not return Guardian Australia's calls at the time of publication.

Dr Helen Szoke, chief executive of Oxfam Australia, told Guardian Australia that Australian retailers compared unfavourably with their international counterparts on the issue.

"We think Australian retailers are dragging their feet," she said. "We know that 50 big iconic brands Europe and USA have signed this accord -- the question is, what's the problem, in Australia?"

"Even the big sporting apparel companies like Adidas and Nike

have become transparent in what they are doing and it's not impacting their bottom lines, so it does surprise me that there is reticence in Australia.

"I'm sure we are only seeing part of the story as to what goes on in these sweatshops. The problem is one of transparency -- we just don't know how many other retailers in Australia are using Bangladesh in this way."

Szoke said that an Oxfam survey of 1,000 Australians found that 70 percent said they would pay more for their clothes if they knew overseas workers were paid a fair wage and that factories were safe working environments.

"Consumers need to let these companies know they are upset about the lack of transparency," she said.

Supermarket group Coles has denied paying Bangladeshi suppliers so little they cannot operate safe factories, The Age reported.



Mohammad Obaidul Karim, chairman of Orion Pharma Ltd, attends an annual general meeting of the company at Orion Pharma Park in Narayanganj on Monday. The company declared 20 percent cash and 20 percent stock dividends for 2012.

Govt set to pass new law to pin down food adulterers

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The draft act will be sent to the law ministry for vetting after it gets approved by the cabinet, said food ministry officials.

"Till now, the issue of food safety has been dealt with in a scattered manner by various government agencies. The new law will bring the issue under one umbrella," said Food Minister Muhammad Abdur Razzaque.

He hoped the bill on food safety will be placed in the parliament's next session.

"We are very serious. We want to enact the law and establish the authority in our tenure," said Razzaque.

The initiative to frame a law on food safety comes in the face of rising health threats amid widespread adulteration and increased use of chemicals to preserve perishables such as fruits and fish.

Currently, a law, Bangladesh Pure Food (amendment) Act 2005, is in effect. But its implementation remains a far cry due to a lack of coordination among various ministries and agencies that are responsible for ensuring food safety.

The present law gives responsibility to the local government, health ministry, food ministry, commerce ministry, agriculture and Bangladesh Standards and Testing Institute (BSTI) to curb adulteration.

Besides, food adulteration has become multifarious and the existing law does not cover all the

aspects, according to food ministry officials.

"Once, food adulteration referred to adding water to milk or stones in rice," said a senior food ministry official. The present law will become invalid once the draft is enacted, the official added.

The draft seeks to establish a 22-member national advisory council on food safety headed by the food minister to provide guidance on implementing the law.

The proposed food safety authority, BSFA, will set quality standards and guidelines for both locally produced and imported food items.

It will ensure compliance with these standards and determine the acceptable limits in the use of chemicals, heavy metals, and radiation limits in foods, according to the draft.

The draft also seeks to prohibit the excessive use of poisonous materials -- heavy metal, hormones, pesticides, antibiotics and health hazardous materials.

It also proposes restrictions on food labelling and using misleading information on nutrition.

The proposed law suggests establishing separate courts on food safety and punishing public officials for failure or negligence in ensuring food safety.

It however suggests keeping sellers outside the purview of punishment if they are not directly involved in adulteration and help the government in finding the culprits.



Anwar Hossain MIH, head of sales and marketing at Dhaka Regency Hotel and Resort, and Eshita Sharmin, marketing manager at Bikroy.com, an online marketplace, exchange documents after signing a deal recently. Daily draw winners of Bikroy.com will enjoy special privileges during Ramadan at the hotel.

Surplus revenue on the rise for BRAC

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A significant portion of its achievement is due to BRAC's 1.05 lakh community health workers, who have "dedicated themselves to bridging the gap between the community and established healthcare facilities".

"BRAC's core microfinance product, Dabi, has shown a vital management shift, as 40 percent of our branches have moved to a monthly collection method from a weekly method," he said.

According to the report's chairperson statement, the programme disbursed Tk 10,127 crore in micro loans in 2012.

To assist the most disadvantaged people in their fight against poverty, BRAC challenges the frontiers of poverty reduction.

Its initiative, targeting the ultra-poor, developed a two-fold strategy based on providing full grants and a grant plus credit strategy. "After its successful implementation in two five-year phases, covering 13 lakh ultra-poor families, we have started the third phase in 2012."

BRAC's loans to members bear annual service charges of 18-27 percent using a declining balance method. Repayments are made in weekly or monthly instalments.

It now operates 17 financially and socially profitable enterprises in Bangladesh in health, agriculture, livestock, fisheries, green energy, printing and retail, making a significant contribution to the local economy through the creation of market linkages, entrepreneurs and employment opportunities.

It serves over 13.5 crore people in 14 countries including Bangladesh, by employing over 1.06 lakh people. The lender has disbursed a cumulative figure of Tk 69,408 crore.

BRAC's contribution to the government exchequer was Tk 62.6 crore in 2012 from Tk 49.92 crore in 2011.

BRAC plans to reach out to the grassroots to identify the post-2015 development agenda and vows to make lasting changes in people's lives based on a survey conducted this year.

Plights of insurance claimants

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"Many insurers have the tendency to evade claims due to a culture of impunity owing to years of being unregulated. But, we are trying to bring proper discipline to the sector," said M Shefaq Ahmed, chairman of the IDRA.

The IDRA came into existence in March 2010 after the parliament

passed two laws -- Insurance Act 2010 and IDRA 2010 -- in a bid to further strengthen the regulatory framework and make the industry operationally vibrant.

At present, there are 62 insurance companies, all of which come under IDRA's oversight.

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BTCL goes all out to award a Tk 400cr deal, violating rules

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The procurement process for Lot-B is currently being revised due to the court verdicts, the official said.

The Lot-A job includes installing exchange switch and access network, while Lot-B is for laying 1,500 kilometres optical fibre cable and building a transmission network.

The Daily Star has obtained the copies of the resignation letter of Alam and the report of the BTCL inquiry committee.



Hasanul Haq Inu, information minister; Anwar Hossain, chairman of Anwar Group of Industries, and Sabur Khan, president of Dhaka Chamber of Commerce and Industry (DCCI), attend the launch of Anwar Landmark's new logo at DCCI auditorium in Dhaka on Sunday.

The hidden barrier to prosperity

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Increment in government revenue can break the barriers of this hard limitation. A wider tax net and an efficient tax collection method can eradicate these kinds of difficulties. While many may think that taking foreign loans to run these kinds of institutions would be justified in dire needs, it should also be taken into account that foreign loans entail interest payments. The resources used for interest payments could be used for other sectors to alleviate poverty. While the tax to GDP ratio has increased from 8.3 percent to 10.5 percent from fiscal 2003 to fiscal 2012, it is still much lower than Malaysia and Vietnam where the tax-GDP ratios are 15.3 percent and 23.1 percent respectively.

The proper use of rising government revenue is one of the instruments, which can break the constraints that hinder development, and facilitate economic growth.

The writer is the head of research at The Daily Star and can be reached at faariats@gmail.com.

	<h1>Rajdhani Unnayan Kartripakkha</h1> <p>Rajuk Bhaban, Dhaka-1000 Website: www.rajukdhaka.gov.bd</p> <p>Sealed offers are being invited from genuine Bangladeshi Resident, Company or Institution for leasing out of a few Commercial Plots at Uttara Commercial Area, Sector No. 11 & 13, Road No. Sonargaon Janapath (Detailed description of the schedule is given below) on lease basis. The detailed information of the plots and Plan/Map may be seen at the Office of Deputy Director (Estate-2), Uttara, RAJUK, Dhaka.</p>					
1.	Invitation for re-auction tender No. and dated	:	Estate-2(Uttara)/01/2012-2013, Date-23/06/2013 (Re-Auction).			
2.	Name of the work	:	Re-Auction for Commercial Plots at Uttara Commercial Area, Sector No. 11 & 13, Road No. Sonargaon Janapath.			
3.	Procurement method	:	Open Tendering Method.			
4.	Eligibility of auctioneer	:	Genuine Bangladeshi Resident, Company or Institution.			
5.	Last date of selling auction tender documents	:	25/07/2013 (During office hours).			
6.	Last date and time of submission of auction tender documents	:	28/07/2013 at 1:00pm.			
7.	Date and time of auction tender opening	:	28/07/2013 at 2:30pm.			
8.	Name and address of the offices selling auction tender document	:	Manager, Sonali/Janata/Agrani Bank, RAJUK Bhaban Branch, Dhaka.			
9.	Time for buying auction tender document	:	During office hours.			
10.	Name and address of the officers receiving	:	1. Office of the Joint Secretary (Development), Ministry of Housing & Public Works, Bangladesh Secretariat. 2. Office of the Member (Finance/Planning/ Development/Estate/Admin and Land), RAJUK, RAJUK Bhaban, Dhaka--1000. 3. Office of the Commissioner, Dhaka Division, 1st 12-Storied Building Segunbagicha. 4. Office of the Chief Engineer/Director (Estate), RAJUK, RAJUK Bhaban, Dhaka-1000.			
11.	Place of opening auction tender documents	:	RAJUK Board Room, 3rd Floor, RAJUK Bhaban, Dhaka-1000.			
Schedule of Plot						
Sl No.	Name of area	Particular of Plots			Price of auction tender documents (Tk)	Security deposit (Tk.)
		Sector No.	Road No.	Plot Nos.		
1.	Uttara Commercial Area	11	Sonargaon Janapath	54, 68, 76	Tk. 2000/- for each plot	Tk. 20,00000/- (twenty Lac only for each plot)
2.	Uttara Commercial Area	13	Sonargaon Janapath	35, 37, 49, 53, 67, 69	Tk. 2000/- for each plot	Tk. 20,00000/- (twenty Lac only for each plot)
13.	Name of the official inviting auction tender		:	Engr. Md. Nurul Huda.		
14.	Designation of the official inviting auction		:	Chairman, RAJUK.		
15.	Address of the inviting auction tender		:	3rd Floor, RAJUK Bhaban, Dhaka-1000.		
16.	Contact details		:	Director (Estate), RAJUK Bhaban, Dhaka-1000.		
17.	RAJUK authority reserves the right to accept any auction or reject the whole auction tender or part of it, at any stage without assigning any reason thereof whatsoever.					
GD-2499		Chairman Rajdhani Unnayan Kartripakkha				