

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."

Coles also said it was pulling out of Bangladesh within "the next few weeks" and if it returned it would sign the garment industry safety accord.

"Coles is currently contracted with just one supplier in Bangladesh for a small mix clothing order which will be completed in the next few weeks," Coles spokesman Jon Church said.

"Like all of our international suppliers, the factory working on this order has been audited to international standards and complies with our ethical sourcing policy."

"Our sourcing from Bangladesh has always been small -- less than 5 per cent of the total mix clothing range -- and we have no plans to source any further product from the country."

"Should this change in the future we would audit any factory supplying to us and be prepared to sign the Bangladesh Safety Accord."



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.

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ORION PHARMA LTD.
ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING - 2012

Venue : Orion Pharma Park
Sumitpara, Siddhanta Pur, Narayanganj
Date : 24/06/2013, Monday
Time : 10:00 AM

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.



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.

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.

"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.

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

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."

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

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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.

Australians will pay more for workers safety: survey

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The survey also revealed that 84 percent of consumers want Australian companies to sign onto an accord to improve safety at Bangladesh factories.

Oxfam Australia Chief Executive Helen Szoke said given that sweatshop conditions were the norm throughout Asia, and globally, it was not enough for companies to assure customers the people making their clothes were working in safe conditions - proof was needed.

"Since 2005, more than 1,800 people have died in fires and

building collapses in Bangladesh. Companies must do more before more lives are lost," she said in the survey report.

More than 40 international retailers have already agreed to sign to the Bangladesh Accord on Fire and Building Safety which will make independent reports on factory safety inspections public, allow workers to refuse dangerous work, ensure training for workers and that companies are covering building repair costs.

On Friday, Cotton On became the fourth Australian company to

sign onto the Accord. Szoke praised the retailer's decision to join after they completed their enquiries with IndustriALL on the implementation of the agreement, the Oxfam survey said.

"Following public debate on the conditions of clothing workers, only four Australian companies - Kmart, Target, Forever New and Cotton On - have prioritised clothing workers' health and safety by joining this important Accord. The pressure is now on for Big W, Best and Less and other Australian companies sourcing from Bangladesh to follow suit."

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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. 20,0000/- (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. 20,0000/- (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.					