

Amnesty urges Qatar to end abuse of World Cup workers

AFP, Doha

Amnesty International urged Qatar to end abuse of migrants working on football World Cup infrastructure, as it issued a report Monday citing cases in which they were referred to as "animals".

The 169-page report called on world football governing body FIFA to press the Gulf state to improve the conditions of foreign labourers, alleging "alarming" levels of exploitation against the workers mostly from South or Southeast Asia.

Doha, which rejects claims of slavery-style conditions on its construction sites in the world's wealthiest nation per capita, said it would investigate the report's findings.

Amnesty said its researchers had heard one construction firm manager use the term "animals" to describe migrant workers.

And a worker told the watchdog

that "Nepalis are treated like cattle".

Amnesty secretary general Salil Shetty said the findings indicated "an alarming level of exploitation" in Qatar, and called the abuses "widespread" and "not isolated".

"FIFA has a duty to send a strong public message that it will not tolerate human rights abuses on construction projects related to the World Cup."

After meeting Qatar's emir and prime minister on November 9 in Doha, FIFA chief Sepp Blatter said the issue of working conditions was being addressed.

Shetty said Amnesty had met officials who were "very willing to recognise that there is a problem and... strongly oriented to find solutions".

After embarking on a multi-billion-dollar plan to host the 2022 World Cup, Qatar has come under the spotlight as migrant workers pour into the tiny gas-rich nation.

The plight of migrant workers

remains an issue across the oil-rich Gulf.

Amnesty's report documented several abuses, including "non-payment of wages, harsh and dangerous working conditions, and shocking standards of accommodation".

Its team "found migrant workers living in squalid, overcrowded accommodation with no air conditioning, exposed to overflowing sewage or uncovered septic tanks."

The London-based watchdog said "dozens" of them have been trapped inside Qatar, which demands foreigners obtain an exit permit to leave.

In response, Qatar said it would ensure the report was included in an inquiry it has already launched into the alleged abuses.

The authorities had "asked international law firm DLA Piper to include the Amnesty report... in the independent review it is

carrying out concerning the conditions of foreign labour," said a foreign ministry source quoted by the official QNA news agency.

"The state of Qatar gives huge importance to the protection and upholding of human rights by enacting the relevant laws and establishing the bodies tasked with protecting and reinforcing those rights," the source added.

In the report, Amnesty said "the onus is on the government of Qatar to make the necessary changes to its legislation and to enforce worker protections".

Amnesty said abuses were systematic under a sponsorship system that "affords unscrupulous employers powers to exploit their employees, not least of which is the ability to prevent workers leaving the country."

Shetty said his team in Doha on Friday met "a group of 70 workers" from Nepal, Sri Lanka and other nationalities who said

they "have not been paid for nine to 10 months".

"It is simply inexcusable in one of the richest countries in the world that so many migrant workers are being ruthlessly exploited, deprived of their pay and left struggling to survive."

Many workers have also reported poor health and safety standards, said Amnesty.

It cited an unnamed Doha hospital representative as saying that "more than 1,000 people were admitted to the trauma unit in 2012 (after) having fallen from height work".

Some 10 percent became disabled and "the mortality rate was 'significant'."

A September report in Britain's Guardian newspaper said 44 Nepalis have died working in Qatar this year. Amnesty did not confirm the figure.

Some abused labourers worked for subcontractors employed by



Abu Zafar Hedaytul Islam, managing director of Trust Bank Securities Ltd, and CM Fazle Sami, managing director of Cygnus Innovation, exchange documents of an agreement for implementation of stockbroker back office software solution, at the bank's principal branch in Dhaka on Tuesday.

BB forms integrity committee

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Bangladesh Bank (BB) has formed an integrity committee with the bank's deputy governor Nazneen Sultana in the chair to implement the National Integration Strategy in the central bank.

The panel was formed on the back of the National Integrity Strategy recently formulated by the government, the BB said in a statement.

BB has asked all banks to provide the central bank's integrity committee with the information and other materials required. A detailed guideline has also been sent to the banks.

Robi set for tech upgrade

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Replying to queries on an initial public offering by Robi, Weerasinghe said the operator is not thinking about a public offering, as there are no capital constraints. "So, raising capital through an IPO is not our requirement at the moment."

"We want to first strengthen our position, and we do not want to give any specific date for listing."

On the regulatory regime in Bangladesh, Weerasinghe said it is the most challenging country. "The Bangladesh market has suffered significantly due to inconsistency in predictability and sustainability."

He said a significant difference in taxation in Bangladesh and South Asia compared to Southeast Asia and higher spectrum fees put the mobile operators in a fix. "We invested \$2 million for 5MHz for 3G in 2006, while we invested \$210 million this year for the same spectrum in Bangladesh." The additional money could have been better used to expand the network and improve rural penetration, he said.

Making a brief presentation on 3G, Olivier Letant, head of strategy of Axiata Group, said internet users will grow to 50 billion by 2020 worldwide that was 9 billion in 2010.

"Bangladesh currently has 30 million internet users and the government wants to see the figure increase to 80 million over the next five years."

He said internet access through mobile devices is growing rapidly globally.

"For the first time in the world, mobile internet access has grown larger than desktop access," he said, citing an example from China where 75 percent users access the internet through mobile.

Mohd Khairil Abdullah, chief marketing and operating officer of Axiata Group, said it is one of Asia's largest telecommunications companies focused on high growth low penetration emerging markets.

The Malaysia-based group has controlling interest in mobile operators in Malaysia, Indonesia, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh and Cambodia as well as significant strategic stakes in operators in Singapore and India.

He said the group serves over 215 million mobile subscribers in Asia and provides employment to over 20,000 people. The group's annual revenue in 2012

Court rule against regulator on Ollo licence

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The telecom ministry and Mango Teleservices, another participant of the auction in 2008, are also included in the case.

The process will have to be a competitive bidding or auction or even through a beauty contest; but the government did not do that when they issued the licence to Ollo, which is a violation of the law.

Haque also said the government recently issued 3G spectrum in the 2100 Megahertz (MHz) spectrum band to the mobile operators at Tk 150 crore per MHz after auction, but they have issued 40 MHz of the same kind of spectrum to Ollo, which is almost nothing.

When asked, Barrister Khandaker Reza-e-Raqib, a lawyer of BTRC, said the court did not stay the licence.

He refused to say anything more before getting a certified copy of the case.

BTRC recently asked BIEL to submit the spectrum and licence amount to receive the licence.

Earlier, the mobile operators also expressed interest to get the same 2600 MHz spectrum to the telecom ministry to roll out LTE services, but the ministry denied.

External balance drops 18pc in Q1

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Though the surplus in overall balance fell in the first quarter, the current account surplus almost doubled during the period in comparison to previous year on the back of high export growth. In the first three months of fiscal 2013-14, the current account surplus advanced to \$786 million from \$331 million last fiscal year. At the same time, exports rose 22.04 percent and imports 9.37 percent, which combined to lower trade deficit to 32 percent.

Of note is the fact that exports to the European market climbed 27 percent and the US market 15.7 percent in the first quarter, in spite of industrial accidents which damaged the country's reputation on the world stage and withdrawal of trade facilities to the US.

The export growth to the two markets, the country's most important ones, at this stage of fiscal 2012-



BANK ASIA

A Rouf Chowdhury, chairman of Bank Asia, inaugurates the bank's 80th branch on Sonargaon-Janapath Road in Uttara, Dhaka yesterday. Md Mehmood Husain, managing director, was also present.



RAHIMAFROOZ

Mudassir Murtaza Moin, group director of Rahimafrooz Group, receives the "Best Brand Award-2013" for the second time in a row for Rahimafrooz IPS, at a function organised by Bangladesh Brand Forum at Sonargaon Hotel in Dhaka recently.

Qantas blasts predatory rivals

AFP, Sydney

Qantas chief executive Alan Joyce has demanded the government halt what he described as a "virtual takeover" of Virgin Australia by foreign airlines, saying they were working to destabilise the national carrier.

Singapore Airlines, Air New Zealand and Abu Dhabi-based Etihad already own 63 percent of Qantas' main domestic rival and under a Aus\$350 million (US\$328 million) capital raising announced last week, that could increase to as

much as 72 percent.

In a searing letter to Prime Minister Tony Abbott and all state governments, seen by the Australian Financial Review, Joyce charged it was the "final act" by "predatory" state-owned airlines to cripple Qantas both domestically and internationally.

Joyce's ultimate fear is that the capital raising, "supported and largely underwritten by three foreign governments", was part of a strategy of subsidising Virgin so it could continue to undercut Qantas on profitable domestic routes.

Govt aims for 24,000MW power generation capacity by 2021

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To address the shortfall, he recommended imports of liquefied natural gas and coal from Indonesia, Australia and South Africa, together with enhanced gas exploration and production, domestic coal development and safe nuclear for base load.

Rahman also called for ensuring gas supply to power plants via upgrades in distribution infrastructure. The shipping ministry also needs to establish deep sea port and dredge for smooth fuel and equipment transportation for achieving

24,000MW by 2021.

The communication ministry needs to strengthen track and road capacity for heavy weight equipment, provide locomotive and wagon for liquid fuel transportation and regularly carry out road maintenance for smooth operation.

The government needs to ensure financing for public and private sector projects, availability of foreign currency, development of skilled manpower and introduction of corporate culture and professionalism in sector entities, he said.

Where the super-rich buy their luxury aircraft

BBC NEWS

"When you're flying private, you're not faking it," goes the saying.

If someone is spending tens of millions of dollars on a private jet, you know there has got to be serious money behind them.

But, as aircraft dealer Steve Varsano says: "Don't forget the extras."

Once you've got the jet, there's the running costs - the fuel, the pilot, the insurance. "It can add up to thousands of dollars an hour."

But if you have the cash, London-based Varsano has the aircraft.

He runs the world's first - and, as far as he knows, still the only - street-level retail showroom dealing in the sale of used and new private jets.

It includes a full-size mock-up of an Airbus ACJ 319 business jet cabin - the real thing costs about \$60m (£37m), plus \$30m to fit out - filled with all that the discerning private traveller needs: a pop-up video screen, cigar box and bar, sound system, space at the back for a bedroom, a coloured lighting scheme to soften the mood, soft carpet.

While you're sitting in the luxury leather chairs - \$40,000 each, since you ask - you can look through the cabin windows at a video-simulated sky as if you're flying through the clouds.

The whole place is spotlessly clean and oozing wealth and sophistication. And that's exactly what Varsano

wants when the energy billionaires, corporate chiefs, and celebrities walk through his door.

The Jet Business is at Hyde Park Corner, in a part of London that has become a magnet for the super-rich.

Varsano, pretty wealthy in his own right, lives just around the corner in exclusive Mayfair, with his girlfriend Lisa Tchenguiz, sister of the property tycoons Vincent and Robert Tycoon.

Varsano reckons that just about anyone who might be in the market for a private plane eventually passes through central London.

"That's why I chose the best location in world," says the New York-born entrepreneur. "If I was trying to sell to these people in their own country, I would be travelling permanently."

The Jet Business opened two years ago, although Varsano has been in the industry for almost three decades.

For mere mortals, private jets are the ultimate luxury accessory. But Varsano insists that for his clients they are just time machines.

"They want to cut down on dead time. These people might be in the air once, twice a week. It's about convenience. It's about getting a deal done - perhaps at some distant airport - and going home," he says.

So, private jets are just a functional tool, then? "The view that it's all about flying off on a skiing trip with champagne and girls is just so untrue," he says.



GOLDEN HARVEST

Rajeeb Samdani, managing director of Golden Harvest Ice-cream, and Syed Gousul Alam Shaon, managing director of Grey Advertising Bangladesh Ltd, exchange documents of a deal of at Grey's office in Dhaka recently. Grey will handle the communication functions for Golden Harvest.



EXIM BANK

Mohammed Haider Ali Miah, managing director of EXIM Bank, inaugurates the bank's 77th branch in Magura recently.