

Asia's migrant domestic workers rally to fight low pay, abuse



Vendors selling secondhand electric fans wait for clients at a market for migrant workers in China.

REUTERS, Bangkok

Suay Ing was nine when she was first employed as a domestic worker, cleaning for a family and sleeping in their laundry room in the northern Thai city of Chiang Mai for \$10 a month.

The eldest of four children of migrant construction workers from Myanmar, Ing was 14 when she was trafficked to Bangkok by a broker who promised her a job and abandoned her.

Hungry and with no identification papers or money, the unkempt child finally found a noodle shop owner willing to hire her for 3,000 baht (\$100) a month in exchange for working 12-hour shifts with three days off a month.

Over the next 14 years, he taught her to manage the shop, but also beat her, docked her pay and even denied her food.

"Even if my staff did anything wrong, I had to take responsibility for it. He would say, 'How do you want to be punished? Do you want to be slapped? Do you want me to take your salary?'"

recalled Ing, who is now 31.

Two years ago, she plucked up the courage to leave her abusive boss, turning again to domestic work, but this time, armed with greater knowledge of her rights, she got decent pay, days off and reasonable hours.

Over time, Ing began sharing her experiences with other domestic workers and she now offers advice on how to find safe, fair employment with the Network of Migrant Domestic Workers.

"I tell domestic workers to ask about their days off, about whether or not they will have their salaries cut if they go home," Ing said in a voice that speaks to her determination to keep others from suffering hardship.

"If the domestic workers ask these questions, then the employers know they can't take advantage of them."

Asia is home to 41 percent of the estimated 53 million domestic workers worldwide, most of them women who enjoy few rights, work excessively long days and earn far below the minimum wage, rights groups say.

Under Thai law, domestic workers are entitled to at least one day off per week. Labourers have a right to an eight-hour workday and a minimum wage of 300 baht a day, but these do not apply to domestic work, which is not considered formal work.

The MAP Foundation, a migrant rights group based in Chiang Mai, said most domestic workers it had surveyed are paid between 4,300 baht and 5,000 baht (\$130-\$150) a month and work up to 14 hours a day.

"Thai society does not see domestic work as work, so the person doing housework is not a worker," said Poonsap Tulaphan, director of the Foundation for Labour and Employment Promotion, a Thai organisation that helped set up the Network of Migrant Domestic Workers and its Thai predecessor, HomeNet.

The Myanmar domestic workers' labour woes in Thailand reflect a wider problem across Asia.

Many migrant domestic workers come from the Philippines, Indonesia, Laos, Cambodia and Myanmar, and work in neighbouring countries as well as the Middle East.

Occasionally, cases of violence make the headlines, such as the 7-year-old girl from Myanmar who was enslaved for five years in Thailand, or the Indonesian maid, Erwiana Sulistyaniyah, whose employer in Hong Kong was found guilty in February of charges including grievous bodily harm.

Abuse and exploitation in the Middle East has been so extreme that Indonesia recently barred domestic workers from working in 21 countries, media reports said.

Activists say travel bans will only push women to migrate through illegal channels, putting them at greater risk of abuse.

The best fix is to persuade governments to protect their citizens' rights, says Elizabeth Tang, general secretary for the Hong Kong-based International Domestic Workers Federation.

She said Asians have traditionally hired domestic workers from indigenous or ethnic minority groups, lower castes or poor families, and believe they are doing them a favour by



Golam Hafiz Ahmed, managing director of NCC Bank; Khaled Afzal Rahim, head of cards, and Shab Pada Dey, assistant general manager of Transcom Electronics Ltd; attend the signing of a deal at a programme recently. The bank's credit cardholders will get SmartPay equal monthly instalment facility on purchases of household electronics, appliances and mobile handsets at all outlets of Transcom Electronics.

Amazon starts declaring sales to pay taxes in 4 European countries

AFP, Paris

Online retail giant Amazon said Tuesday it has started declaring sales in four European countries which would now be subject to local taxes, a move that could affect other multinationals under EU investigation for possible tax avoidance.

Amazon has tax agreements in Luxembourg under which it recorded European sales and paid taxes on them in the tiny country instead of at the source. The deal had provoked howls of criticism that the Internet giant was trying to avoid taxes, and sparked a probe by the European Commission.

But the Seattle-based Internet giant said it has established local branches in Britain, Germany, Spain and Italy.

"More than two years ago we began the process of establishing local country branches of Amazon EU Sarl, our primary retail operating company in Europe," the company said in a statement.

"As of May 1, Amazon EU Sarl is recording retail sales made to customers through

these branches in the UK, Germany, Spain and Italy," it said. "Previously, these retail sales were recorded in Luxembourg. We are working on opening a branch for France."

Recording its revenue in Luxembourg, a country with tax advantages for businesses, considerably lightened Amazon's tax burden. This practice is legal, but has become more and more contested in Europe, especially at a time when countries are facing huge budget deficits.

Amazon is among several large businesses under the spotlight in Europe over tax rules in Luxembourg and elsewhere.

The European Commission is also investigating tax agreements involving US tech giant Apple in Ireland, coffee-shop chain Starbucks in the Netherlands, and Italian automaker Fiat in Luxembourg.

Ricardo Cardoso, a Commission spokesman in charge of competition issues, said Amazon's changes "going forward do not affect the ongoing EU state aid investigation regarding the possible advantages that Amazon would have potentially received in the past through the tax ruling."



M Shahidul Islam, additional managing director of United Commercial Bank, receives the Gold Trade Award-2014 from Maumer Mesak, relationship manager for financial institutions at Commerzbank AG, at a programme recently.

IMF: China's yuan no longer undervalued but further reforms needed

REUTERS, Beijing

China's yuan currency is no longer undervalued after its recent substantial appreciation, but the government should quicken reforms to get to having "a floating exchange rate", the International Monetary Fund said on Tuesday.

The IMF has previously labeled the yuan as "modestly undervalued", despite the currency's gradual appreciation since a landmark 2005 revaluation. The yuan has gained sharply against most non-dollar currencies in recent months.

"While undervaluation of the renminbi was a major factor causing the large imbalances in the past, our assessment now is that the substantial real effective appreciation over

the past year has brought the exchange rate to a level that is no longer undervalued," the IMF said.

In a reference to how China still has a large trade surplus, despite yuan appreciation, the Fund said Beijing's "still-too-strong external position highlights the need for other policy reforms - which are indeed part of the authorities' agenda - to reduce excess savings and achieve sustained external balance."

The IMF said China still faced risks from unsustainable credit and investment growth, and it urged the government to quicken reforms, including making the yuan more flexible.

"We believe that China should aim to achieve an effectively floating exchange rate within 2-3 years," the IMF said.

IMF said.

The comments came in a statement issued after a visiting IMF team completed a consultation with Chinese officials.

China should step up fiscal support for its economy if growth dips below 6.5 percent this year, or prepare to take steps to rein in credit and investment if growth surprises on the upper side, the fund said.

The IMF expects China's annual economic growth to be 6.8 percent this year, before slowing further to 6.25 percent in 2016, it said in a report.

"If incoming data suggest that growth is likely to exceed 7 percent, the authorities should take advantage of the opportunity to reduce vulnerabilities faster," the IMF said.

Samsung to merge two major units

AFP, Seoul

Samsung Group announced Tuesday the merger of two major affiliates, as the South Korean business giant accelerates restructuring efforts ahead of a generational power transfer within the founding Lee family.

The all stock deal, approved by the boards of both companies, would see Samsung's de facto holding company Cheil Industries -- which has interests from fashion to theme parks -- acquire general trade and construction affiliate Samsung C&T.

The merger, which is expected to be completed by September pending shareholder approval, will see Cheil offer 0.35 new shares for each Samsung C&T share.

The two companies are both listed on the Seoul stock market, with Cheil valued at 22 trillion won (US\$2 billion) and Samsung C&T 8.6 trillion won as of Tuesday morning.

The combined company -- which will take the Samsung C&T name -- will target annual sales of about 60 trillion won in 2020, compared with their combined sales of 34 trillion won in 2014, Samsung said in a statement.



BPDB's International Tender Notice

বিদ্যুৎ সামগ্রী বাতি ব্যবহার কর্মসূল

1	Ministry/Division	Ministry of Power, Energy & Mineral Resource/Power Division.			
2	Agency	Bangladesh Power Development Board.			
3	Procuring entity name	Director, Purchase, BPDB, Dhaka.			
4	Procuring entity code	Not used at present.			
5	Procuring entity district	Dhaka.			
6	Invitation for	Procurement of Lead Acid Battery with Accessories (including Installation & Commissioning) for Bheramara GT Power Station, BPDB, Kushtia.			
7	Invitation for tenders Ref. No.	Pur-429/2015.			
8	Date	24/05/2015.			
KEY INFORMATION					
9	Procurement method	Open Tendering Method (single stage single envelope).			
FUNDING INFORMATION					
10	Budget and source of funds	Revenue Budget (Foreign).			
11	Development partners (if applicable)	Not applicable.			
PARTICULAR INFORMATION					
12	Project/programme code (if applicable)	Not applicable.			
13	Project/programme name (if applicable)	Not applicable.			
14	Tender package No.	GR-1 (New) FY-2014-2015.			
15	Tender package name	Procurement of Lead Acid Battery with Accessories (including Installation & Commissioning) for Bheramara GT Power Station, BPDB, Kushtia.			
16	Tender publication date	24/05/2015.			
17	Tender selling date	24/05/2015 to 13/07/2015.			
18	Tender closing date and time	14/07/2015 at 11:00am (tender receive any day before 14/07/2015 during office hour).			
19	Tender opening date and time	14/07/2015 at 11:30am.			
20	Name & address of the office	Directorate of Purchase, BPDB, WAPDA Building (9th Floor), Motijheel C/A, Dhaka.			
	Selling tender document (principal)	Directorate of Purchase, BPDB, WAPDA Building (9th Floor), Motijheel C/A, Dhaka.			
	Selling tender document (other)	Not applicable.			
	Receiving tender document	Directorate of Purchase, BPDB, WAPDA Building (9th Floor), Motijheel C/A, Dhaka.			
	Opening tender document	Directorate of Purchase, BPDB, WAPDA Building (9th Floor), Motijheel C/A, Dhaka.			
21	Place/date/time of pre-tender meeting	N/A.			
INFORMATION FOR TENDERER					
22	Eligibility of tenderer	As per tender document.			
23	Brief description of goods or works	Procurement of Lead Acid Battery with Accessories (including Installation & Commissioning) for Bheramara GT Power Station, BPDB, Kushtia.			
24	Brief description of related services	N/A.			
25	Price of tender document (BDT)	Tk. 1,000.00 (one thousand only) as Pay-Order (non-refundable) from any schedule bank of Bangladesh in favour of the Director, Directorate of Purchase, BPDB, Dhaka.			
26	Lot	Identification of lot	Location of delivery	Tender security amount in Tk.	Completion time in weeks/months/days
	Lead Acid Battery with Accessories (including Installation & Commissioning)	Bheramara Power Station, BPDB, Kushtia	BDT 1,00,000.00 or USD 1,250.00	120 days from the date of opening of L/C	
PROCURING ENTITY DETAILS					
27	Validity of tender and tender security	120 (one hundred twenty) days and 148 (one hundred forty-eight) days respectively from the date of tender opening.			
28	Name of official inviting tender	Md. Abu Yousuf.			
29	Designation of official inviting tender	Director, Directorate of Purchase, BPDB, Dhaka.			
30	Address of official inviting tender	WAPDA Building (9th Floor), Motijheel C/A, Dhaka-1000.			
31	Contact details of official inviting	Tel: +88 02 9550532 & 7126144, Fax: +88 02 7126151 www.alltender.bpdb.com			
32	Special instruction	Any tender received by the purchaser after the deadline for submission of tender shall be declared late, will be rejected and returned unopened to the tenderer.			
					The purchaser reserves the right to accept any tender, to annul the tender process, or to reject any or all tenders, at any time prior to contract award.

Md. Abu Yousuf

Director

Directorate of Purchase

BPDB, Dhaka



Mozammel Hoque, editor of Daily Karatua, opens the three-day Singer Furniture Family Fiesta-Furniture and Family Festival, in Bogra yesterday.

Russia should not cut itself off from foreign investment: Putin

REUTERS, Moscow

Russian President Vladimir Putin said on Tuesday the country should not cut itself off from foreign investment and technologies.

"We should not, on any account, cut ourselves off" from the kind of foreign investment and technology that can drive economic growth, Putin told a conference of business people.

After annexing Ukraine's Crimea region in March 2014, Russia was hit with Western sanctions that limited its access to foreign capital and technologies, especially for the banking, energy and defence sectors. Russia imposed retaliatory sanctions.