

LABOUR RIGHTS

The attempt of suppressing workers and union leaders with prolonged unlawful detention is nothing new in Bangladesh. There are too many instances in which owners use false cases as tools to crack down on labour movements. According to labour rights activists in the country and abroad, the recent detention of six labour leaders of the Trade Union Centre (TUC)—after initial rejection of their bail—on the basis of charges filed by the Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA), is one such attempt to silence unions.

The case was filed against 12 labour leaders and about a hundred unnamed workers of Ashiana Garments Ltd, after 400-450 workers of that factory staged demonstrations in front of the BGMEA building on January 31. Their factory had closed down until further notice and the workers had turned up in front of the BGMEA building to seek answers. They claimed that they were not there on their own accord, but that the authorities had called them in for a meeting.

According to the application to file a case made by Major (Retd) Md Rafiqul Islam, additional secretary (administration), BGMEA, on January 31, the striking workers of Ashiana



PHOTO COURTESY: TUC

The workers of Ashiana Garments Industries Ltd were waiting in front of the BGMEA building for the promised meeting and protesting peacefully.

SILENCING THE LABOUR MOVEMENT

NILIMA JAHAN

Garments Ltd. as well as the labour leaders were involved in violence, vandalism and attempted murder of BGMEA officials. The statement claims that the labour leaders snatched mobile phones, a laptop and money from the BGMEA officials. It also states that the workers are “criminals who carry out nefarious activities by exploiting the name of the garment workers trade union centre”.

So who exactly are these workers—these “criminals” by the BGMEA’s standards—and why were they demonstrating in the first place?

It all began when Ashiana Garments Ltd. fired a line iron man named Mamun, who was the vice president of a proposed union there. The union had been organising in the factory from April 2017.

Mamun recounts how he was fired: “On January 28, after lunch break, my production manager (PM) told me that I was being transferred to the fifth floor, and that I had to move immediately. There was only one hour left to the day, and my supervisor, to whom I was supposed to submit my work, wasn’t present on the floor. So I told the production manager that I would join the fifth floor the next day. He accepted my request rationally and left.”

The next day, however, when Mamun went back to the factory and reported to the PM, the latter handed him a dismissal letter. “I was shocked. I thought how could they fire me for such a simple matter, without any prior notice?”

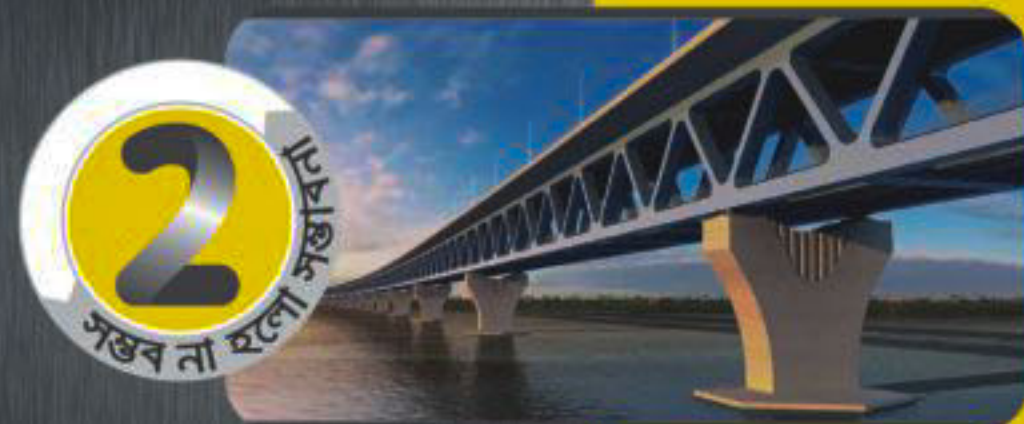
When Mamun came back to his floor, other workers found out that he had been fired and became agitated. Khadijah, a sewing operator on Mamun’s

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PHOTO COURTESY: TUC

BGMEA officials and staff broke the rickshaw, which was carrying the Mike workers allege.



বিশ্ব বলেছিলো- পদ্মা সেতু ‘সম্ভব না’
একজন প্রধানমন্ত্রী আর ১৬ কোটি বাঙালি বলেছিলেন-
‘কেন না!’

