

Violence Continues Over Pay Hikes In Bangladesh

Published on Industrial Maintenance & Plant Operation (<http://www.impomag.com>)

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Julhas Alam, Associated Press

DHAKA, Bangladesh (AP) — Police fired rubber bullets and tear gas Monday in the third day of clashes with thousands of [garment workers](#) [1] demanding better minimum wages amid escalating tension over the country's main export business.

Police said the violence mainly took place in the Gazipur and Savar Industrial zones, just outside the capital of Dhaka. Hundreds of factories that produce clothing for many big global brands, including Wal-Mart and H&M, are located in those two areas.

Witnesses said the workers also poured into the streets at two major intersections in Dhaka, disrupting traffic.

Scores were injured in the violence as the workers threw stones at police, who retaliated with rubber bullets and tear gas, according to local police chief in Gazipur, Abdul Baten. More than 100 factories were closed for the day, he said.

The Bengali-language Prothom Alo daily reported that the angry workers attacked a makeshift camp of security officials and looted eight rifles in Gazipur. They later burned four rifles and dumped the rest in a sewage drain, it said.

About 50 people were injured Sunday in similar street violence.

The workers are demanding that their minimum monthly wage be raised to 8,114 takas (around \$100) from the current 3,000 takas (\$38). Factory owners are unwilling to increase the monthly wage beyond 3,600 takas (\$45), saying it would inflate their production costs.

The Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association on Monday asked the government to intervene.

"We need to run our factories. We demand authorities ensure security to continue productions," S.M. Mannan, vice president of the industry association, told The Associated Press after a meeting with a Cabinet minister and representatives of the workers on Monday.

He said the shutdown of the factories would force them to lose money, and could affect their ability to pay workers before an Islamic festival next month.

"We have to pay them salaries and bonuses before Eid-al Adha. If we can't continue production, how could we be able to confirm our shipments?" he asked.

Bangladesh earns about \$20 billion a year — almost 80 percent of the country's total export earnings — from exporting garment products, mainly to the United

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States and Europe. It employs about 4 million workers, mostly women.

The harsh and often unsafe working conditions in Bangladesh's garment industry gained global attention after the collapse of an eight-story factory killed more than 1,100 people in April. The sector has also experienced numerous fires, including a November 2012 fire that killed 112 workers.

Authorities in Bangladesh and global clothing companies have pledged to improve safety standards.

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