

## Link workers' wages to export prices, Dhaka told

Bangladesh has been urged to review wages of readymade garment workers and allow them freedom of association to ensure steady growth of its largest export-earning sector.

A multi-stakeholders' conference on Bangladesh's garment industry that concluded Monday resolved that the growth in apparel sales will make no sense if workers' conditions do not improve accordingly.

A declaration after the conference, organised by the London-based International MFA Forum, linked higher wage to better export prices as it noted that miserable prices paid to local manufacturers of garments by foreign buyers instigated deprivation of workers.

Amid reports of surging apparel export orders in recent months, the declaration reads: 'MFA Forum's concern now and in the future is that increasing orders should lead to greater benefits for workers and society as a whole, as well as for the manufacturers and buyers.'

The forum stressed that wages needed a review as soon as possible and the issue should be tied with discussions on price paid by buyers, New Age newspaper said Tuesday.

Driven by cheap labour and significant foreign investment, the readymade garments and knitwear industries, having estimated 400-plus units of various sizes, have earned the highest foreign exchange for the country year after year.

However, wages remain low and working conditions are poor and workers have frequently resorted to violence and mass action for causes ranging from late payment of wages and bonus, lack of basic amenities, accidents that lead to casualties that are not cared for and high-handed behaviour of the employers.

Allegations about the use of child labour, coming from international labour bodies, also stalk this sector.

After irate labourers took to streets and damaged or destroyed over 200 units two years ago, their employers marched to the then prime minister's office, alleging 'foreign hand' behind the rioting, an allusion to India, seen as a competitor in the world market.

New Delhi has, however, agreed to import eight million garment pieces annually, which is a significant figure to boost the industry, as a concession to Bangladesh, which is one of the South Asian region's least developed countries.

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