

Bangladesh fact sheet

Twelve trade union members from five IndustriALL garment affiliates in Bangladesh have been arrested and detained by police. All the arrested trade unionists remain in jail and have been denied bail. The most recent arrest took place on 30 January.

Background

- On 11 December workers at Windy Apparels Ltd in the Ashulia garment-producing hub of Dhaka, walked off the job to call for an increase in wages. Over the following days, the wage strikes gained support and spread to around 20 garment factories in the area.
- In retaliation the Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA) shut down around 60 factories for several days, with most employers refusing to pay workers while they were closed.
- On 21 December police arrested at least eight trade union and worker rights leaders in Ashulia after they voluntarily attending a meeting called by police to discuss the strikes. The next day, police in Gazipur arrested two union organizers from their homes who were later beaten by police while in custody.
- On December 27 two union organizers in Gazipur were arrested, while one was later released. At least one journalist and several workers are also reportedly in jail following the protests.
- Several factories and police have filed complaints against those arrested in Ashulia that include charges of unlawful assembly, criminal trespass, and intimidation, among others. One complaint against the Ashulia detainees was filed under section 16(2) of the 1974 Special Powers Act, a section that was repealed in 1991 and no longer exists.
- Since the strikes, IndustriALL affiliates' union offices in Ashulia have been forcibly shut down, ransacked and vandalized, sustaining substantial property damage and theft. Organizers, staff and activists have fled the area and/or are in hiding out of concerns for personal safety.
- At least 1,600 workers in Ashulia have been suspended and fired in connection with the December protests. The factory owners and the government have used the protest to purge union leaders, activists and those who raise their voices from their factories. Criminal cases have been filed against hundreds of named and unnamed workers in an attempt to intimidate them.
- The government has imposed a climate of fear and retaliation across workers' legal organizing and trade union activity and is refusing to engage and negotiate with legitimate trade unions.