



# 50,000 garment workers protest wage cuts

DHAKA, BANGLADESH: Police fired rubber bullets and tear gas on Sunday as some 50,000 garment workers staged protests over wage cuts near the Bangladeshi capital, officials said.

Two people have died and scores have been injured in violent clashes as protests entered a second day and spread to scores of factories at the Ashulia industrial zone 30 kilometres (19 miles) outside Dhaka, police officials said.

"More than 50,000 workers have joined the protests. They have become violent and hurled stones and rocks at our officers. We fired rubber bullets and tear gas to disperse the protesters," Dhaka district police chief Iqbal Bahar said.

The new clashes came a day after one garment labourer was shot and killed and several injured when around 7,000 workers clashed with police over wage cuts and unpaid salaries.

Police officer Rehana Begum said the body of another labourer was recovered from the area Sunday, taking the death toll to two.

Scores of officers and workers were also injured in the clashes, she added.

Factories in the South Asian nation have been hit hard by the global economic crisis with several reportedly cutting wages to compete for orders with other producing countries, such as Vietnam, China and India.

"On average clothing factories have cut wages by 20-30%. The owners said they have been hit by the global recession," Bangladesh Apparel Workers Federation Tauhidul Islam said.

"But the government figures have so far shown that there has hardly been any impact on order prices."

Inexpensive clothing accounts for 80% of Bangladesh's exports, which are vital to the economy.

40% of Bangladesh's industrial workforce is in the garment sector.

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