

5,000 garment workers sacked in BD over strikes

DHAKA: Nearly 5,000 low-paid Bangladeshi garment workers stitching clothes for global brands have been sacked by factory bosses for joining strikes over wages this month that turned violent, police said on Tuesday.

Thousands of labourers walked out of factory floors across the country in days-long protests that disrupted the \$30 billion industry — and saw police opening fire rubber bullets and tear gas on demonstrators.

One worker was killed and more than 50 injured in clashes in Ashulia, a key industrial town outside Dhaka where clothes are sewn for retail giants H&M, Walmart and many others.

Police say thousands of factory workers accused of looting and vandalism during the protests have been fired, but unions have accused the industry of intimidation and a crackdown.

“So far the factories have dismissed 4,899 workers due to the unrest,” a senior police officer told AFP on condition of anonymity.

More than 1,200 garment workers — whose wages start at \$95 a month — were dismissed from a single factory.

Unions say the real number of those fired is much higher, closer to 7000, and that nearly a hundred more have been arrested in roundups.

Salauddin Shapon, general secretary of industry body IndustriAll Bangla-desh Council, said many workers were afraid to return to work.

“Cases have been filed against 3,000 unidentified workers, which has created panic. Many have opted to stop going to factories,” he said. Police would not comment on allegations of widespread arrests.

Bangladesh is home to 4,500 clothing factories employing 4.1 million workers, and is the second-largest exporter of garments worldwide after China.

AFP