

Dhaka workers protest new pay structure

Bangladesh government raises minimum monthly wages by 80% hoping to end stir

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Dhaka: Thousands of garment factory workers Friday took to the street protesting a new wage structure just a day after Bangladesh said it would raise the minimum monthly wages by 80 per cent.

The government expected the raise would end months of street protests.

Angry protesters blocked major thoroughfares and damaged several buses, private cars and motorbikes. At least 20 people were injured during the clashes as more than 30 protesters were arrested by police.

They also ransacked several garment factories and pelted stones at businesses and shops demanding the minimum wage to be fixed at taka 5,000 (Dh264.41) instead of taka 3,000 as announced.

Elite anti-crime Rapid Action Battalion troops and police in riot gear kept a sharp vigil on demonstrators at troubled city corners while Dhaka's police chief AKM Shahidul Haque urged demonstrators "not to fall into the 'trap' of the 'conspirators'" and asked their leaders to be responsible.

Haque said police would show zero tolerance for the vandalism of vehicles or destruction of property.

He said police had intelligence reports on a number of the workers' leaders who he said were instigating the violence.

"We will not spare them...we have no options other than taking a tough stand in this regard," Haque said.

Labour and Employment Minister Khandaker Mosharraf Hussain announced the rise in minimum monthly wages for millions of garment factory workers, mostly women. Wages would be fixed at taka 3,000, starting in November.