

Factory strike ends after pay rise deal



■ Mr Al Haiki, centre, speaks to representatives of MRS Fashions, the Indian and Bangladeshi Embassies, MWPS and ICRF



■ Mr Al Haiki, left, with Mr Lamba, second from right, ICRF and MWPS volunteers and female factory workers

AN estimated 2,000 workers who downed tools last week after trashing a factory have agreed to report for duty today following a pay rise.

Staff of MRS Fashions, which manufactures garments for US companies such as Macy's, JC Penney and Walmart, have accepted a raise of BD8 per month – and will be treated to a celebration party tonight by the management.

They smashed up the company's production facility in Hajiyat, near Riffa, and staged a mass walkout last week amid allegations of withheld salaries, unfair deportations, poor working conditions and mistreatment – claims the company denied.

Bahrain's labour authorities later issued the Indian and Bangladeshi employees an ultimatum that they would be deported unless they returned to work, after they initially re-

By ANIQA HAIDER
fused to hold talks with management.

The workers instead issued a list of demands including better wages, food and medical care and threatened to continue their strike indefinitely until they were met.

Labour Ministry inspection and labour unions director Ahmed Al Haiki told the *GDN* that striking workers received a written warning, stating that legal action would be taken if they did not report for duty.

However, the staff have now agreed to a pay rise negotiated between the Labour Ministry, company management, the employees' embassies, the Indian Community Relief Fund (ICRF) and Migrant Workers Protection Society (MWPS).

"We tried to convince these workers to go back to work, but they were adamant and said company manage-

ment mistreated them," said Mr Al Haiki.

"We had several meetings and spoke to the workers about problems they would face if they leave this job.

"We also had meetings with company officials and embassies, who spoke to the workers and tried to convince them.

"The problem is finally solved and workers – men and women – have agreed to go to work from Tuesday."

Mr Al Haiki added that talks would also be held on the daily targets set for the workforce.

Targets

"A BD8 increase in wages was decided by us and the management and workers agreed to it," he said.

"Daily target to be met by workers will be discussed by our grievance department and company officials."

Meanwhile, he revealed 11 workers arrested on Sunday after the

MRS Fashions factory was trashed had been released after the company dropped all charges against them.

"Eleven workers who started all this were taken into police custody after the management filed a complaint against them," he said.

"But they were released after charges were dropped.

"They are now willing to join others for work."

Mr Al Haiki added that he had been impressed by the professionalism of the embassies involved, company management and community volunteers in resolving the problem.

"I was personally involved in this case and I must say the company and embassies did a good job in handling this case," he said.

"I would also like to thank MWPS and ICRF volunteers, who spent time and tried their best to find a solution to end this strike.

"Bahrain is known for protecting

workers' rights and its health and safety regulations when it comes to labour issues.

"This company is one of the finest in Bahrain and follows labour laws, which proves they have a good record with us.

"We will regularly follow up and monitor the company and workers."

Mr Al Haiki said a party had been organised at the workers' accommodation tonight to celebrate.

"We want the workers to know that we are here to help them and protect them, as long as they follow Bahrain labour law," he told the *GDN*.

"A small party has been organised to appreciate the efforts put in by all to end this strike."

Company executive director Harinder Singh Lamba declined to comment yesterday, saying he would only speak after seeing his staff at work today.

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Woman dies in home fire

A BAHRAINI woman has died in hospital from smoke inhalation after fire broke out at her home in Isa Town.

Lulwa Mubarak Hamad Eid was unconscious when she was rescued from the bedroom of her burning house by firemen on Sunday night.

However, the 46-year-old was pronounced dead at Salmaniya Medical Complex (SMC) early yesterday morning.

The fire broke out at around 11.40pm and a neighbour was first to raise the alarm.

Her brother Mohammed Hamad Eid and their elderly mother, Wadha Fahad, managed to escape the property.

However, when Mr Eid tried to go back into the house to rescue, his sister he was beaten back by thick smoke, his nephew Ahmad Riyadh told the *GDN*.

"My aunt was trapped inside and no one was able to go back inside

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and save her," he said.

"My uncle was able to bring out my grandmother, but he couldn't save my aunt.

"When firemen arrived to put out the blaze, she was found unconscious on the floor of her room.

"Firemen brought her out and transferred her to hospital in an ambulance, where she died."

The cause of the fire is still under investigation and Civil Defence sources said Ms Eid's bedroom, where the blaze is thought to have started, was gutted.

"The bedroom she was sleeping in was gutted," they said.

"The case has been referred to the CID and Public Prosecution."

Ms Eid's funeral took place at Manama cemetery yesterday morning.



■ Batelco has announced more winners in its SMS challenge competition. The quiz-style contest saw customers battle it out to earn the most points in either daily or weekly question-and-answer prize draws. Weekly prize winners Ayed Mahmood Ayed, Helal Tomiz Uddin and Sayed Sadeq Asaad each bagged themselves \$2,000 in the final two weeks of the competition. Above, Mr Uddin, right, receives a cheque for his \$2,000 prize from a Batelco representative.

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