

Wages in Bangladesh's Garment Sector Could Triple This Year

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In November, it seemed that apparel organizations in Bangladesh were pushing for a wage hike double the current rate, but now it looks like workers rights unions are pushing for a threefold increase.

Wages for garment workers in Bangladesh haven't gone up since the 5,300 taka (\$64) rate was set in 2013. Considering four years have passed without any addition to workers' pay, the Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA) has been appealing to the government to establish a wage board to review rates on a more regular basis.

Also in November, BGMEA said it was urging the wage board to double the current pay in line with the changes in cost of living since 2013, but workers' rights organizations are demanding the wage rate reach 16,000 taka (\$192), a 201 percent increase, or three times the current pay.

Bangladesh's labor and employment ministry earlier this month did form a panel to round out what it says will be its permanent wage board, charged with making decisions on these money matters.

"The committee will file a report with its recommendations in six months, after which the government will finalize the new wage structure," BD News 24 reported Bangladesh state minister Mujibul Haque as telling the press. "We hope we'll be able to give a new pay structure for the RMG sector within five years from the last one," which would still mean this year.

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The ready-made garment industry in Bangladesh appears to be stuck between a rock and a hard place when it comes to remaining competitive with wages, but also ensuring workers are at the very least, content.

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"We are going through a very critical period. We achieved only 6 percent growth [in export] against a target of 14 percent. The other countries are surpassing us in growth, because we lack basic materials like a deep sea port," former president of the Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FBCCI) AK Azad, told BD News 24. "We will lag again if a worker unrest takes place."