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'We've been suffering for a long time': Migrant workers struggle as company delays payments for almost a year

D By **Doha News Team** - October 18, 2020

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Workers were left with no choice but to break their silence in June after not receiving their salaries for 10 months, prompting authorities to respond.

With no money to send their families back home amid a global economic recession, workers from the Imperial Trading and Contracting Company (ITCC) began to lose hope.

The hopelessness, however, resulted in an urge stronger than ever to demand their delayed rights after not getting paid their salaries for several months.

A video from a protest in June resurfaced on the internet this week, showing workers from ITCC frustrated after receiving no income for close to a year.

According to an ITCC employee who spoke to *Doha News*, by June, around 550 migrant workers had not received their salaries since November the previous year.

The employee said that the police came to the protest and told them the company will be paying within 15 days. A month then passed with no money in their bank accounts, prompting some 20 workers to camp out in front of the company's office in protest.

Since then, some workers received half of their September salaries only and were not given their previous missed payments, the source told *Doha News*.

One source also said that a group of workers resigned without fully receiving their final settlements. In protest, the former employees have been sleeping inside the company's offices and say they will not leave until they receive the money owed to them.

According to one of the company's employees, ITCC made staff sign a document that claimed they had received all of their final settlement money, but in reality they were only paid 30%.

Amongst those who spoke to *Doha News*, one worker told us that 15 of his colleagues were paid 30% of their pending salaries but were asked to sign a document on Monday that falsely claimed they received 100% of their wages.

Trying to make ends meet

One worker told *Doha News* that he had been forced to take out loans just to survive, and has since been struggling to pay back what he has borrowed because he has still not received the money owed to him.

"We work hard in the company, we fully support the company, but nobody is helping us now," said a worker.

While investigating this story, *Doha News* has found out that the owner of ITCC was arrested by police several months ago and has since been in custody for violating labour laws and failing to pay his employees. The company itself is bankrupt, and the owner according to one source, has been forced to sell some of his assets abroad in order to be able to pay the outstanding wages.

As with most migrant workers, many have families back home that rely on them financially, meaning that spouses, parents and children have been left without any income as a result of the company's shortcomings.

"We have been suffering for a long time. Our families are living in hell," one of the workers told *Doha News*.

Between a family whose needs must be provided for, to empty payment promises from ITCC management, to having to lie to their loved ones—the workers are feeling more and more helpless.

Doha News reached out to ITCC for comment, but has received no response from the company yet.

Government's response

To understand the situation more and the status of the workers' complaints, Doha News reached out to the Government Communications Office (GCO) regarding the matter.

According to the GCO, The Ministry of Administrative Development, Labour and Social Affairs (MADLSA) investigated the company in cooperation with the relevant authorities. The MADLSA found that the company did in fact commit several violations of the Labour Law related to salary settlements.

Following the complaints, the company was immediately placed on MADLSA's list of banned establishments and legal proceedings were launched. Since then, the company has begun disbursing outstanding salaries, but the settlement of the remaining cases is ongoing.

The GCO said that ITCC also registered to secure a loan through the programme administered by Qatar Development Bank (QDB) to cover salaries and living expenses of employees.

"MADLSA reminds all businesses that the Government has issued clear instructions on their legal obligations," the GCO told Doha News.

MADLSA has allocated resources to upgrade the Wage Protection System and strengthen the capacity of inspectors to ensure the early detection and quicker settlement of wage-related violations.

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Qatar's labour laws

The issue the workers have been dealing with also violates the newly reformed labour laws, which were **praised** by many international organisations, including the **International Labour Organisation** (ILLO).

In August's reforms, Qatar's government also imposed strict payment laws that require employers to pay their workers a minimum wage of QAR 1,000, in addition to a housing allowance of QR 500 and food allowance of QR 300—bringing the total to QR 1,800.

Violators will face imprisonment for a period of six months and a fine of no less than QR2,000 and no more than QR100,000 per employee. In cases of repeated violations, penalties will be increased.

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