

21 April 2016

Business & Human Rights Resource Centre invited Kabir steel Limited to respond to the following item:

- [7 hurt as 'factory guards' open fire on protesters](#), Daily star, 29 Mar 2016

Kabir Steel Limited sent us the following response:

We would like to strongly protest and highlight the numerous factual inaccuracies in the report published by The Daily Star, titled “7 hurt as 'factory guards' open fire on protesters’. We would like to thank you for offering us the opportunity to respond to the libelous accusations leveled against our company in the report in question. KSRM is a steel manufacturing organization belonging to Kabir Group of Industries and it has been in operation since 1984, steadily building a solid, professional and socially conscious reputation over the years.

To begin with, the entire incident that has been highlighted in the above reports and others that have picked up the story from it, have all failed to mention that there is no association with the unfortunate death of one of our workers and the safety practices of our company. We would like to unequivocally stress that we have made significant up gradation and changes in the ship recycling facility in accordance with the Hong Kong convention, covering all the social compliances required by the local authority. We also pride ourselves in being one of the first yards to have achieved ISO 9001, 14001, 18001 and 30001. We have also taken ample steps to achieve one of the safest work environments in the country. This is the kind of value our corporation wants to add to the industrial sector of our country and associating a road accident to a ship yard and making it look like the negligence of yard operation is unexpected and also uncalled for.

We would like to register our position as a whole from the perspective of Kabir Group of Industries and hopefully clarify and correct some of the reporting errors. On 28 March 2016, a Long Vehicle carrying one of our factory billets from Chittagong port, just before entering our main gate, hit and ran over two of our workers, Sumon and Delwar, fatally injuring the former. The truck struck with such ferocity that Sumon’s body was stuck between the vehicle and the pillar of our main gate. The truck driver immediately ran away after the accident. Despite the accident being fatal, the supervisor of our factory decided to immediately call the Yard Doctor, while the Yard Authority informed the local police about the accident.

Later the doctor, with the help of the police, rescued the trapped body of Sumon using our own mobile crane. The body was then rushed to the police station in one of our ambulances. By then a vested group had organized itself in front of our gate and began demanding for immediate negotiation. We then contacted the truck company from whom we had rented the vehicle, explaining the situation and demanding that they hand over the driver to the police. As the other employee (Delwar) was already taken to local hospital, the doctor returned to his place without getting involved in any discussion with the gathered mob who peppered him with numerous questions (about 250 persons according to the police report). Unfortunately, both the local and international media aired the news that the yard held the body without any response whatsoever, a statement which is totally wrong and completely baseless.

The gathered crowd then began asking for the compensation. Without the presence of the

family members of the deceased or a police offer, such discussions of compensation could not take place. The group that had gathered outside continued to rile the workers and at one point, the gathered crowd began attacking our main gate and our workers with sticks, rods and whatever they could find.

At one stage, they attempted to start a fire on one of the yard's oil reservoir, creating a dangerous situation for everyone present. Then they started breaking in the second gate and still throwing bricks and stones from all around ferociously to the staff inside. Left with no choice, a member of staff fired warning shots in the air to disperse the crowd. All these cartridge guns were licensed and authorized for use by the yard security personnel to safeguard the life / properties in extreme situation. It must also be noted that these firearms are made to disperse crowd and fire blanks meant not to fatally injure. The Yard's security workers are also vetted before selection, with only those with a background in Law Enforcement being given the job. Hence, these guards knew not to break the law.

Later on, the Yard authority was informed that 5 to 6 persons from the mob were injured after the yard's security personnel's warning shot incident led to a sudden stampede as everyone tried to disperse. It is prudent to mention that not a single injury was life-threatening or permanent in anyway whatsoever. The Yard authority then proceeded to pay each of the injured a mutually agreed sum of compensation in the presence of police officers to calm the situation.

The police have continued to investigate the case and KSRM have been providing them with full support.

This is the complete account of the incident with the said facts present in the police report of the incident as well which has been recently released. Lastly, we'd like to contest the allegations of a letter sent by Industrial Global to the Honorable Prime Minister of Bangladesh that a 16-year old was injured in the stampede that followed the firing of the blank shots. This is a fabrication since no 16 year old is mentioned in any of the police reports and since the mob consisted of workers from surrounding areas, it must be mentioned that no factory hires those below the working age which 16 is for this sector. Kabir Group have operated in his field for a long time and have amassed a lot of experience and goodwill of the people. Kabir Group has always been in full support of the community we involved in, treating our employees well, celebrating festivals with them and we have even donated a large piece of land for the construction of the school which has now enrolled hundreds of local students. We understand the realities of working in a hard industry such as ours but our worker's safety is of paramount concern. We hope this rejoinder succeeds in dispelling the misunderstanding prevalent in this case. We would like to mention that instantly giving in to the demands of random people seeking to monetize the death of one our fellow workers is not the wisest decision. We thank you again for providing us the opportunity to have our say and we hope we have clarified the incident for those concerned.