

Labor Protests Become More Common in Recession-Hit Dubai

By **STEPHEN JONES**
Epoch Times Staff

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates—The buses arrived at the dusty labor camp to ferry close to 5,000 workers to a construction site nearby. For close to two weeks however, none of the workers boarded.

The stalemate between the employer, Arabtec, and the low-paid workers was finally broken on Wednesday however, when the police were called in to arrest 70 ringleaders of the strike.

In recession-hit Dubai, labor protests like the one this week are becoming increasingly common. The problem has become more pronounced as smaller construction firms become unable to pay their workers for months.

Since many workers are forced to submit their passports to their employers, when an executive flees the country to escape the prison sentence that typically accompanies a debt default, tens of thousands are left stranded.

"These cases are far too common," said one South Asian consulate employee, who declined to be named. "Protection for them is limited, but it's improving."

The men who built the majority of the gleaming skyscrapers and ultramodern residences in Dubai often themselves live in makeshift camps in the choking industrial areas of the city.

The accommodations, informally known as labor camps, are often rudimentary dorms where men sleep eight to a room.

During the winter, it is common for rains to cause septic tanks to overflow and the camps become a squalid health hazard. During the summer, when temperatures soar to 120 degrees Fahrenheit, they can become death traps if they are not properly air-conditioned.

Workers typically earn as little as Dh 800 a month (US\$220), yet the money they send to their families back home contributes 2.4 percent to the \$50 billion a year India receives in remittances.

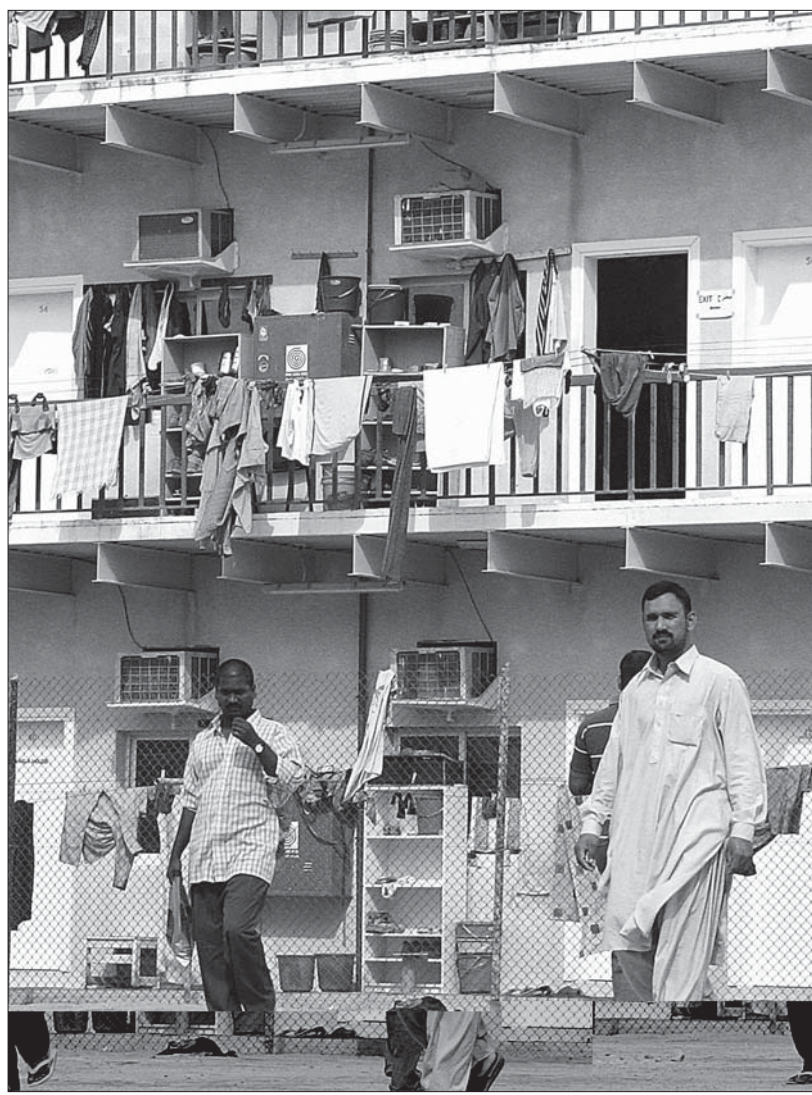
Human Rights Watch has long raised concern about the treatment of workers in the United Arab Emirates and the attention has spurred authorities here into action.

In a newly released report, announced at a press conference in Dubai on Wednesday, HRW highlighted the improvements that have been made, but said that more needed to be done.

The newly formed Dubai Police short-term labor inspection section was recently established to deal with the problem. On Tuesday, they announced that they had been able to repatriate 850 workers who had been unable to leave the country because their company had not given them return airfares. In the end, the company was ordered to come up with the Dh 850,000 (US\$231,000) required.

This week's protest was the second in as many months. In December, almost a thousand workers used their buses to block a busy roundabout in an industrial area of the city and sat on the road in a silent protest.

Four riot vehicles arrived within two hours and scores of black-clad men in ski masks and clubs poured



LABOR CONDITIONS: Asian workers walking in Sonapur camp in Dubai (file photo, 2006). Seventy ringleaders were arrested on Wednesday for organizing a strike against low wages paid by Arabtec construction company. Foreign workers in Dubai are forced to live in cramped, squalid so-called "labor camps."

RABIH MOGHRABI/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

out. However, there were no clashes between the two groups, and police were able to ensure that the demands of the group of unpaid workers were met.

Other protests can be more violent. In 2008, over 3,000 workers were arrested in the neighboring emirate of Ras al Khaimah following a protest where they had attacked security staff.

Part of the problem is that workers brought to the Gulf are often duped by unscrupulous recruitment agents in India.

The contracts they signed before leaving the country are often swapped upon arriving in the Emirates with another, far less appealing version.

On Wednesday, the Indian Minister for Overseas Affairs Vayalar Ravi said at a press conference in Dubai that an online contract registration system would be introduced to ensure that workers were no longer being cheated.

At the initial stage of signing the contract, it would have to be registered online, and the system would be available to authorities in both India and the United Arab Emirates labor ministry, he said.

HRW has previously criticized Indian officials for neglecting their own countrymen in the United Arab Emirates because of a vested interest in the remittances they send home.

"For too long, the Indian government has simply treated these workers as sources of remittance income, with little attention to the abuse and exploitation they endure," said Sarah Leah Whitson, Middle East director at HRW, in an open letter in Nov. 1.

Burma's Landmine Epidemic

By **JAMES BURKE**
Epoch Times Staff

BANGKOK—After decades of conflict, Burma (officially called Myanmar) suffers one of the worst landmine problems in the world with more than 10 percent of the country's townships being contaminated with landmines, says a Swiss-based humanitarian group.

The townships are mainly located in areas dominated by ethnic minorities, on the other side of the border from Thailand, says a report launched in Bangkok this week by Geneva Call.

"The geographic scope of the problem is that 34 of the country's 324 townships are affected," said Katherine Kramer, the Asian program director with Geneva Call.

The report estimates that approximately 5 million people live in the affected townships, and that thousands of civilians have been injured or killed by landmines.

However due to difficulties in accessing the affected regions Geneva Call says there is little known about the true extent of the problem and the impact of the mines on affected populations.

Kramer said that there are significant challenges in addressing the landmine crisis in Burma. The key hurdle, she said, is that the ruling military junta refuses to acknowledge there is an issue.

"Since 2004 the government has refused to authorize activities



IMPACT: A Burmese landmine victim watches as a worker prepares an artificial limb at the Mae Tao clinic in Northwest Thailand.

NICOLAS ASFOURI/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

specifically directed toward addressing the landmine problem," she said.

Based on research performed between June and September of last year, the report says that the junta has banned almost all forms of landmine action with the exception of a limited amount of prosthetic assistance to people with amputated limbs.

The size of the landmine problem has been exacerbated by decades of conflict in the eastern regions, said Kramer. Since Burma gained independence from Britain in 1948, various ethnic groups have sought greater autonomy, resulting in cases of armed rebellions.

Currently, a number of armed groups, such as the Karen National Liberation Army and the Shan Army-South, continue to oppose the military junta that has ruled the ethnically diverse country with a strong hand since 1962.

"Right now the situation is such that it is not a very stable environment for any demining so it is unlikely that demining can take place in the near future," said Kramer.

However, locally based organizations are quite keen to work on the issue, she said while adding

that several were already conducting some type of landmine action such as survey work and victim assistance.

According to research conducted by Canadian organization Landmine and Cluster Munition Monitor, Burma's junta is the only country where the government is laying antipersonnel mines.

The Geneva Call report, however, acknowledges that it is not just military or the ethnic armies deploying landmines. Villagers have used them to protect their communities against attack or theft, and they are also used as so-called "business-mines" by drug production and trafficking interests.

"The mines that have been used have been both commercially manufactured, both from the government's plants as well as from other countries like China," said Kramer while adding that homemade landmines are also in use. The report also said that Russia is supplying landmines to the Burmese military.

The report ranks Burma as having the third highest number of landmine accidents in the world. Afghanistan has the highest, followed by Columbia.

Confucius: The New Cultural Ambassador for the Communist Party?

By **CHEN YILIAN**
Epoch Times Staff

Commentary

A 31-foot bronze Confucius statue recently erected on Tiananmen Square has become the subject of debate. Confucianism, which the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) once harshly denounced, is now being promoted in the Party's heartland.

The CCP says that this statue symbolizes China's return to its national origins. A permanent statue so prominently placed is a significant gesture. By comparison the portraits of Sun Yat-sen and Karl Marx are only displayed once a year. Is Confucius the regime's new, genuine "cultural ambassador"?

A number of anti-communist Chinese observers would rue seeing the day.

Wu Fan, a political and economic commentator and chief editor of China Affairs thinks the CCP chose Confucius because communism has lost steam in China. "Western democracy is criticized by the CCP as 'counterrevolutionary,' Confucius hence became an alternative," Wu said. He added that Chinese people are sick of the Party, "Chinese people today don't want a regime like the CCP. They want new ideas and something new."

Zeng Ning, a scholar from Guizhou Province says that there's

a moral void in China today and people no longer accept the socialism or communism propagated by the CCP.

Human rights lawyer Tang Jiling said, "The CCP has gone bankrupt ideologically and is trying to use Confucius to save itself, but this is shaming Confucius."

Confucius's political concepts were to rule with morality and compassion. Ruling with morality means in order to govern a country well society must have high moral standards. Ruling with compassion means that the government should not kill its own people and should allow the people to live in peace.

But there are huge differences between the CCP and Confucianism, Wu said, "The CCP does not rule with morality or compassion at all, and if it did, it would collapse. Confucius advocated choosing the best, most talented people to become government officials. The CCP does just the opposite. Good people are ostracized, and the bullies are promoted."

Tang added that the main tenet of Confucianism is to govern with benevolence and be benevolent to the people. "The practice of



CONFUCIUS: A 25.9-foot tall bronze statue of Confucius in Tiananmen Square, Beijing on Jan. 11. There has been an officially sanctioned revival of Confucius in recent years, but commentators say that traditional Confucian values have little to do with modern Communist Party rule.

STR/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

campaigns against Confucianism have destroyed much of the foundation of traditional Chinese culture and values.

Jim Li, commentator for The Epoch Times, believes that the CCP is now trying to portray itself to the world as the authentic representative of classical Chinese culture; it uses Confucius to support the regime's main slogans of maintaining a "harmonious society," thereby justifying the huge cost of secret police, labor camps, surveillance equipment, armies of censors, and paramilitary corps ready to suppress mass protests. The regime also uses Confucius's "Great Unity" (dayitong) thought to promote a false nationalism and territorial integrity.

"Fundamentally, the CCP's ideas are the opposite of Confucianism, since they are based on class hatred and struggle. The two systems are completely incompatible," Li said, adding that, "Therefore, the CCP is just using Confucianism to boost its image and does not really follow Confucius's teachings."

Although the statue of Confucius was placed on Tiananmen Square, "The true essence of Confucianism has been removed by the CCP," Wu said. He added that, "While the CCP has opened hundreds of Confucius Institutes overseas, it's all pointless. They can't save the CCP."

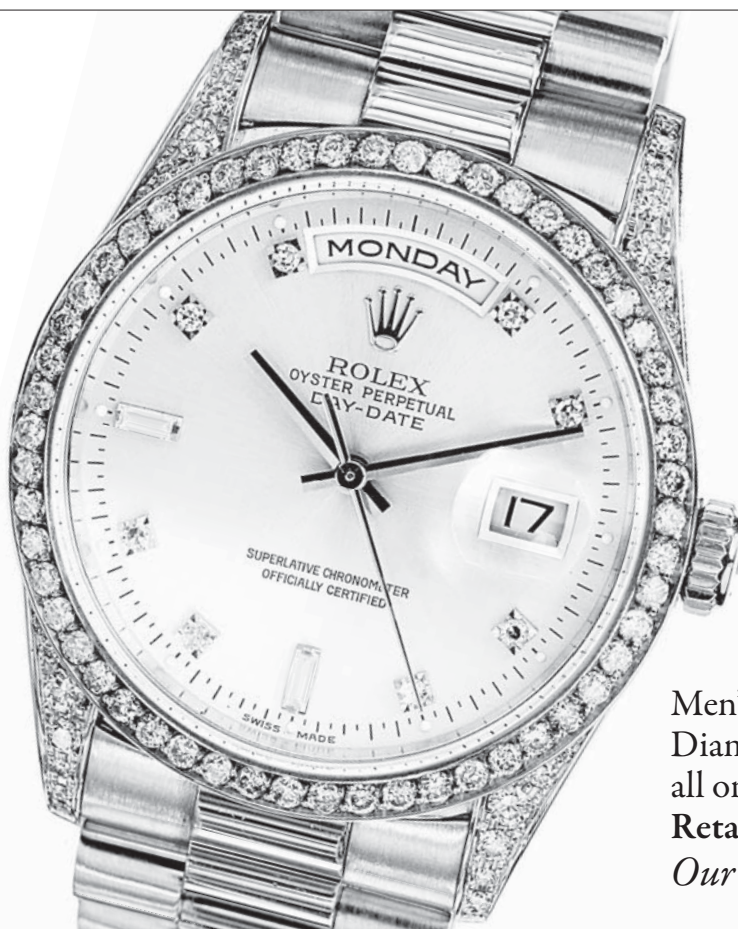
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