

Workers stage sit-in at Shanghai factory

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SHANGHAI — Nearly 1,000 workers staged a rare sit-in protest outside a Shanghai factory Tuesday in the latest sign of strain in China's manufacturing industry, which has been hit hard by the economic crisis.

The workers were protesting because managers at the computer and telecoms equipment factory had failed to fully pay at least six months' worth of overtime, bonuses and benefits, one of the organizers said.

"I know the economy is bad now, but none of us can stand being badly treated by our employers," organizer Ding Xiaohua said.

The phone went unanswered at Huan Hsin Group, which owns the factory, when AFP tried repeatedly to contact them Tuesday.

Several police cars blocked the gate of the factory in southwest Shanghai while about a dozen officers surveyed the peaceful protest, which began on Monday.

Workers said Tuesday afternoon that some colleagues had been taken away by police, while a cordon was set up to separate the striking workers from bystanders.

"It's near the end of the year, most of us are migrant workers so we want to go back home with some cash so we can enjoy the spring festival," said Ding, a 24-year-old technician.

The most important holiday in China, the spring festival is in late January.

Ding said the workers were each entitled to a 1,200-yuan (175-dollar) bonus after working from June to September in temperatures greater than 40 Celsius (104 Fahrenheit).

The summer bonus was supposed to be in addition to their basic 960 yuan monthly salary.

Ding said managers were also paying just over half of the overtime workers were entitled to and were failing to pay the full required amount for medical insurance.

On the sidelines of the protest, a factory worker named Xiao Chen said he was torn about joining the sit-in.

"I don't know if I should join them," he said. "I can't afford to lose this job even though the pay is low." If I quit I don't think I can find another job before the spring festival because many factories are closing down or laying off workers."

China's export growth has slowed significantly with many factories in the industrialized south closing and the economy expanding at the slowest rate in five years.

P.S.

* From the Inquirer - Agence France-Presse - First Posted 19:28:00 12/09/2008:

<http://newsinfo.inquirer.net/breaki...>