

Trade union group calls for probe into working conditions at Chek Lap Kok

# Airport 'built on migrant blood'

By Renato Reyes

A COALITION of labour groups is calling on Governor Chris Patten to launch an independent investigation into working conditions at the Chek Lap Kok airport site, which it says is being "built on the blood of Asian migrant workers".

The Asia Monitor Resource Centre (AMRC) says workers' hours are too long and has cited four on-site deaths in just six months that it blames on heart failure allegedly caused by work-related stress and fatigue.

AMRC, a regional network of Asian trade unions, conducted its own investigation into the condition of the workers, some of whom they interviewed in August.

It said it was "troubled by their stories".

"We don't want to transit in and out of the new airport in the future, knowing full well that it was built on the blood of Asian migrant workers," AMRC director Apo Leong said yesterday.

More than 700 workers are employed by Atlas Consolidated & Development Corpor-

ation Ventures Inc (ACDMC), a subcontractor of Japanese firm Yamazaki Construction Company Ltd and Australian firm Roche Brothers.

The two companies are subcontractors of the Airport Platform Contractors Civil Works Joint Ventures.

AMRC accused Atlas of exploiting workers.

"Although the contract stipulated free food and lodging, 25 per cent of the workers' monthly salary is deducted to pay for accommodation," it said.

AMRC said workers were

required to work 12 hours a day although their contract stated they would only work for 10 hours.

It added they were denied a weekly day off and 11 statutory holidays a year as promised in their contracts, and were granted only two days off a month.

Mr Leong said the workers, mostly from the Philippines, were told they were not entitled to holidays because they were "not Chinese".

Mr Leong said two workers who sued Atlas and three more who testified in their

favour were dismissed by the company.

The case the two workers, Samson Esman and Dannie Abella, filed against Atlas is now in the High Court.

But the Atlas source denied the workers were exploited.

While admitting the contract stipulated only for 10 hours work, he pointed out that any work beyond that was "paid overtime".

"When ACDMC accepted the sub-contract here, it was stipulated they (workers) would be working 13 days out of 14, so we talked to our

people back home," the source said.

"Many of them readily accepted since their net pay is six times bigger than their gross pay back home (in the Philippines)."

But the Atlas source refused to comment on the alleged 25-per cent pay deduction.

"It is very complicated," he said. "It will be argued in the High Court."

"Our problem started when we terminated the contracts of two workers (Mr Esman and Mr Abella) for work performance," the source added.

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