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CORPORATE / Labour rights violation charges

FFI fights move to malign firm

By Shivani Modi, DH News Service, Bangalore:

Bangalore-based garment exporter Fibres & Fabrics International (FFI) announced, in a media briefing, on Tuesday, that it is fighting against a misinformation campaign initiated by Netherlands-based NGO, Clean Clothes Campaign (CCC).

Bangalore-based garment exporter Fibres & Fabrics International (FFI) announced, in a media briefing, on Tuesday, that it is fighting against a misinformation campaign initiated by Netherlands-based NGO, Clean Clothes Campaign (CCC).

In November 2005, CCC and Landelijke India Werkgroep, Netherlands-based NGOs, levelled charges of labour rights violation against FFI and Jeans Knit Pvt Ltd (JKPL). CCC's allegations were largely addressed to international customers of FFI, prominently G-Star, questioning their decision to source from a company that did not safeguard interests of their employees.

"CCC also intensified their campaign in India through Bangalore-based NGOs like Garment and Textile Workers' Union (GATWU), Women Garment Workers Front (Munnade), Civil Initiatives for Development and Peace (CIVIDEP), the New Trade Union Initiative (NTUI)" said FFI in a press release. To safeguard its interest and to stop the "malicious" campaigns FFI filed an injunction suit, in July 2006, against GATWU and others in the Bangalore City Civil Court. The objective, said FFI officials, is to prevent NGOs from passing defamatory information about FFI.

Briefing reporters at the company premises in Bangalore, FFI Director-Manufacturing & Technology M Mohammed Ghiase said, "The allegations made against us are baseless and are preventing our sales growth." When Deccan Herald contacted Jayaram K R, Vice President, GATWU, he refused to make any comment as the matter is in the court.

The impact

FFI is a Rs 400 crore garment company having five units located around Peenya Industrial Area in Bangalore. It employs around 5,500 people and supplies denim pants to international brands like G-Star, Mexx, Gap and Guess. The misinformation campaign has already impacted FFI as its sales remained flat last year against normal yearly growth of 40 per cent. Brands like Tommy Hilfiger, Ann Taylor, VF Corp and Levis stopped sourcing from the company.

"Our business has been impacted by about Rs 140 crore and even the expansion plans have been stalled. If things do not improve large number of employees will lose job," fears Mr Ghiase.

As a follow up to its appeal for injunction, FFI in March 2007 filed a defamation case against CCC, Landelijke India Werkgroep and their service providers in the court of VII Additional Chief Metropolitan Magistrate in Bangalore.

News

National

State

District

City

Business

Foreign

Sports

Comments

Edit Page

Panorama

Net Mail

Your Take

Infoline

In City Today

HelpLine

Daily Almanac

Festivals of India

Weather

In Bangalore

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Min: 20.3

Leisure

Crossword

Horoscope

Year 2007

Weekly

Daily Astrospeak

Calendar 2007

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Cyber Space
Metro Life - Thurs
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»Studying in India

Metro Life - Fri
Open Sesame
Metro Life - Sat
Living
DH Realty
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Articulations
Entertainment
Science & Technology
Spectrum
Sportscene
She
Sunday Herald

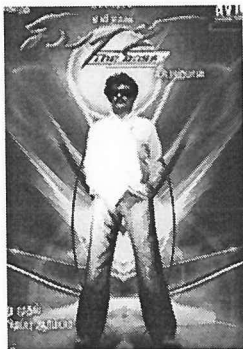
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But despite the court cases CCC and others are continuing their campaign on the internet against FFI, claims the company. After receiving complaints from the NGOs even the Karnataka Labour Commissioner carried out an inspection on FFI's facilities but it could not substantiate any of the claims made by CCC and gave the company a clean chit, informed Mr Ghiase. The next hearing of the case is on July, 27, 2007.

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