

## **PRESS RELEASE**

### **WORKERS OF MICHAEL ARAM EXPORTS PRIVATE LIMITED PROTEST NON-PAYMENT OF WAGES AND DENIAL OF WORK**

Seventeen workers of Michael Aram Exports Private Limited (B-156 DDA Sheds, Okhla Industrial Area Phase I, New Delhi-20) stood with placards in Connaught Place and Janpath Lane Market on Divali, November 1, 2005 to protest against the denial of work in the factory since March 2005, non-payment of wages, and non-payment of their Divali bonus.

Michael Aram is an America-based artist and designer whose metal artware products (tableware, cutlery, vases, hardwares, etc.) are marketed in high end retail department stores in America such as Macy's and Bloomingdales (please see [www.michaelaram.com](http://www.michaelaram.com) for details). He has been conducting business in India for over fifteen years. Michael Aram Exports Private Limited (India) supplies finished products to Michael Aram Inc. (USA), and operates production units in Okhla Phase I, Lado Sarai, Kishangarh, and Sahibabad (U.P.), and is headquartered at F-61, Ground Floor, Sujan Singh Park, New Delhi (Ph.29523920, 29523095, 29522297-8). The annual turnover of Michael Aram Exports is estimated at Rs.9 crores, while that of Michael Aram Inc. is \$4.4 - 6.7 million.

Steel polishing is done at B-156 DDA Sheds, Okhla Phase I. The work is extremely difficult, dirty, and dangerous. Workers are blackened in the production process, wear tattered and torn clothes, cough and spit up dark phlegm, and suffer from chronic colds, fever, stomach disorders, chest pains, and tuberculosis. The workers (24 presently) are on the company muster rolls and have been paid minimum wages (Rs.2950-3386), though they have been denied legal overtime rates, timely dearness allowances, clean drinking water, and proper pollution masks. These workers are migrants from Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, and Jharkhand, and are highly skilled, inventive, and hardworking, and have increased production quantity (by double for many items) and quality since the unit was started in 2001.

In March 2005, a dispute broke out between Michael Aram and the company's Indian Director (and thirty-percent shareholder), Francis Joseph, over alleged siphoning and bungling of funds, amongst other charges, and the case is being carried out in the Company Law Board. Citing this dispute, management stopped giving work to workers in all of the factories of Michael Aram Exports, and workers were made to sit idle. Michael Aram assured workers at the time that the Directors' dispute would be resolved within two weeks and a new transparency and accessibility would be brought into the company. Instead, water, electricity, tea, and other facilities were cut, and wages were given late and reluctantly every month, only after workers filed complaints in the Labor Department (via the Delhi State Kamgar Union (IFTU)). The exigency of going back and forth to the Labor Department led to the death of one worker, Ramdev, whose cycle was hit by a car on the way back from the South Delhi Labor Office in July 2005. Although Michael Aram promised Ramdev's wife at the time that she would be given a job on compassionate grounds, the management has yet to act on this promise.

Meanwhile, in May 2005, Michael Aram started a new company and production unit at C-109, Okhla Phase I under the name of Michael Aram Design India Private Limited, and has been carrying out the exact same work there through a combination of newly recruited employees, former employees of Michael Aram Exports who have tendered their resignations, and contractors' workers working on an illegal night shift, now relocated elsewhere.

In October 2005, alleging that there was no more money left in their accounts, Michael Aram Exports management stopped paying wages to its workers. On Divali, no bonus was given. B-

156 workers have filed a case under the Minimum Wages Act in the Labor Department for non-payment of September wages. Although there have been no official closure or retrenchment notices of any kind, management has offered workers their full and final settlements. But the metal workers of B-156 DDA Sheds desire *work*, in any of Michael Aram's units, including C-109, and have communicated the same in a letter to Michael Aram, who has not given a response, and is said to be in America at present.

Beginning October 27<sup>th</sup>, B-156 workers have taken their struggle to the streets, standing with placards in and around Okhla Industrial Area, in an effort to generate awareness of the above events and developments as well as engage in conversations and discussions with workers at large about their common experiences and difficulties. On Divali, workers brought their placards to Connaught Place and Janpath Lane Market, in the attempt to reach out to inhabitants of the capital city more generally. They quietly stood, like statues, within the busy, festive market as shoppers walked by and occasionally stopped to read the messages and inquire into their present plight.

Should not every worker be allowed to celebrate Divali, even in a modest way? Is this how we wish foreign employers to treat the workers of this country? That too, within the heart of the capital city? Should we be welcoming into this country a set of arrangements which increasingly look upon workers as things to be exploited and discarded at will? Eid and Chhat are now rapidly approaching. Without wages, yet also without the desire to submit to the illegal and inhumane practices of Michael Aram Exports management, B-156 workers will continue to be seen on the streets of Delhi with their placards, with the hope that some festivity might be found in these new conversations and discussions with fellow workers, residents, and co-strugglers of the capital city.

The Employees of Michael Aram Exports Private Limited  
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## TEXT OF PLACARDS

### 1. JULY MEM VETAN RUKA, EK MAZDUR KI JAN GAI AB RUKI HAI TO KITNE KI JAN JAYEGI?

*Vivad ke calte har mahine tankhvah mem deri. July ki payment mem deri ki vajah se shram-vibhag mem shikayat kar lautte vaqt car ki takkar se cycle savar hamare sathi Ramdev ki jan gai. Ab phir vetan rok hai to kitne mazdur bhaiyom ki jan lemge?*

WAGES WEREN'T PAID IN JULY, ONE WORKER DIED  
NOW THEY'VE BEEN STOPPED AGAIN, HOW MANY MORE WILL DIE?

Due to a dispute between the Directors, each month our wage payments have been late. In July, we went to file a complaint in the Labor Department, and on the way back, our co-worker Ramdev was hit by a car and died. Now wages again have not been paid. How many more of us will have to die this time?

### 2. PAHLE ASHVASAN, BAD MEM MUKARNA MAZDUROM KA MANOBAL TODNE KA NAYAB TARIKA

*Director Michael ka ashvasan March 05 mem do hafte mem kam dene ka, pardarshi company banane ka, parantu aj 6 mah bad bhi kam nahim diya. Hamare sathi Ramdev ki shram vibhag mem shikayat kar lautte vaqt accident mem maut ke bad unki patni ko naukri ka vada kiya, parantu aj 3 mah bad bhi naukri nahim di hai. Pata nahim mritak mazdur ke patni aur baccom ka kya hoga? Abhi management dvara vetan bonus nahim dene ka nirnay. Kya ham ummid kar sakte haim ki management is bar bhi apni bat se mukaremge?*

FIRST GIVE YOUR WORD, THEN GO BACK ON IT  
A FINE WAY TO BREAK WORKERS' SPIRIT

In March 2005, the Director, Michael Aram, promised to give us work within two weeks' time and to bring transparency to the company. But today, six months later, he has yet to give us work. On the way back from filing a complaint on non-payment of wages at the Labor Department, our co-worker Ramdev had a road accident and died. He gave his word that he would give Ramdev's wife a job but today, three months later, she has yet to be given this job. What will happen to Ramdev's family now? Now management says that they will not give us our wages or bonus. Can we possibly hope that they will go back on their word this time?

### 3. DASHAHRA PHIKA, DIPAVALI ANDHKAAR

*Dashahra to jaise taise bit gaya. Karva Chauth karvi rahi. Dipavali andheri dikh rahi hai. Tankhvah to di nahim, bonus ki aas karem kaise? Baccom ko kaise bahlayemge, patni ko kaise bahkayemge? Khud to bam bane baithe haim, patakha kaham se bajayemge?*

DASHAHRA WAS LACKLUSTRE, DIPAVALI WILL BE TOTAL DARKNESS

We somehow got through Dashahra. Karva Chauth was bitter. Dipavali is looking absolutely black. Our wages have yet to be paid. How can we hope for our bonus? How will we give our children a good time? How will we explain things to our wives? We ourselves have become bombs. Where is the question of exploding firecrackers?

#### 4. DARPAN VAHI, CEHRA BADAL GAYA

*Pakke mazdurom ko khali bitana, nai factory khol vahi kaam karvana. Sthai karmcariyom ko khali bithana, bahar thekedari ke zariye kam karvana. Ghotala ke nam par factory band karne ka bahana, nai factory mem naye sire se ghotala karna.*

#### THE MIRROR'S THE SAME, ONLY THE FACE HAS CHANGED

Make your permanent workers sit idle, start a new company and have the very same work done there and through outside contractors. Close the factory on the pretense of the bungling of funds, open a new factory and start bungling anew.

#### 5. DO MALIKOM KE BIC PIS GAYA MAZDUR

*Do malikom ke bic vivad jhagra ghotala adi ki ladai March 5 se shuru hua aur ham mazdurom ko khali bithaya. Dusra nai company Michael Aram Design ke nam se khol dena, kam vahi karvana, purane logom ka resign lekar naye sire se bharti karna, naya ghotala calu. Sthai mazdurom ko khali bithaya aur bahar thekedarom ke madhyam se kam karvana. Tankhvah to band ho gai to bonus ki ummid kya karem? Vivad, jhagra, ghotala malikom ke bic, bali ka bakra bana mazdur.*

#### WORKERS CRUSHED BETWEEN TWO PROPRIETORS

A dispute between the two proprietors over alleged bungling of funds began in March 2005 and we workers were made to sit idle. A new company was started under the name Michael Aram Design India Private Limited, and the same work is being carried out there. Resignations were tendered from former workers in exchange for fresh employment and along with this, bungling of funds has started afresh. Permanent workers are made to sit idle while work is done outside by contractors. Wage payments have been stopped. May we hope for our bonus to be paid? The dispute, quarrel, and bungling are between the proprietors, but workers have been made the sacrificial goats.

#### 6. PAHLE HALAL, BAD MEM JHATKA MAZDUROM KO MARNE KA NAYAB TARIKA

*Directorm ke vivad ke calte ham sabhi ko March 2005 se khali baithaya. Cay pani bijli adi band aur ab tankhvah bhi dena band. Halaal kiya to tankhvah band kiya. Jhatka mara to 60 admi ko a canak hisab kiya. Abhi bhi hamari halaal jari, aujar tez karne ki taiyari.*

#### FIRST SLICE THE THROAT, THEN CHOP OFF THE HEAD A FINE WAY TO KILL OFF WORKERS

Due to a dispute between the Directors, we have been made to sit idle since March 2005. The company stopped tea, water, electricity, and now they have stopped paying our wages. They sliced the throat, and wages were stopped. Then they chopped the head, and 60 workers were given their final settlements. Our throats are still being sliced. The blade is being sharpened for the chop.

#### 7. TANKHVAH BAND, MALIK FARAAR

*Company ke donom malikom ke vivad ke calte March 2005 se ham mazdurom ki khali bithaya aur Sitambar se tankhvah bhi band kar di. Jaham ek taraf ham apni rozi-roti ke lie pareshan haim to dusri taraf ek malik Dilli mem chupa hua haim to dusra malik America cala gaya. Ab tak payment nahim mila. Management ka*

*kahna hai ki company ke khate mem paisa nahim hai. 'Malik se bat karo, shram-vibhag mem shikayat karo, malikom ka putla phumko, jo caho so karo.' Jab donom malikom faraar haim, to ham mazdur kisse bat karem? Jiske pas paisa hai, vah to kahim bhi bhag sakta hai. Parantu ham mazdurom ko payment nahim milegi to makan-malikom aur dukandarom se ham kahim aur kaise bhag sakte haim?*

## WAGES STOPPED, PROPRIETORS GONE

Due to a dispute between the two company proprietors, we workers have been made to sit idle since March 2005. Since September, wages also have been stopped. While we are facing great difficulty for our daily bread, one proprietor is hiding out in Delhi and the other has left for America. We have not been paid our wages, and management says there's no more money in the company account. 'Go and talk to the proprietors, file a complaint in the Labor Department, burn effigies of the proprietors, do whatever you feel like.' When both proprietors are nowhere to be found, whom are we to speak to? Those who have money can run anywhere. But if we don't get our wages, can we possibly flee from our landlords and shopkeepers?

### 8. NAUKRI SARKAR KI, SEVA PUNJIPATIYOM KI

*Malikom ke vivad ke calte har mahine payment mem deri aur phir payment hi band kar di. Har mahine shram-vibhag mem shikayat dalne par shram-adhikari pratyaksh mem hamare paksh mem bol kar hamem ashvasan dete haim, hamara hausla badhate haim. Shram adhikari company mem 6 baje chutti ke bad hi pahumcte haim, derh ghante tak company mem rukte haim. Jab bahar ate haim to cehra khushhaal, magar khabar hamesha badhaal hi dete haim. Shram-adhikari sarkari naukri nahim karte haim, punjipatiyom ki naukri karte haim. Kaham milega nyay?*

## GOVERNMENT EMPLOYMENT, BUT SERVICE TO CAPITAL

Due to a dispute between the two proprietors, every month our wage payments have been late and now they have been stopped altogether. Every month, upon filing complaints with the Labor Department, the labor officers give assurances to us and bolster our spirits. The labor officers show up at the company only after 6 pm, and stay there up to 1½ hours. When they emerge from the factory gate, their faces are always beaming, but the news they bring is always bad. Labor officials don't do government service, they work for the capitalists. Where will one get justice?

### 9. HISAB NAHIM, KAAM VETAN CAHIE

*Ham kushal karigar haim. Hamne jugadom ke zariya bhi utpadan badhaya haim, quality sudhara hai. Iski saza yah hai ki donom malikom ke vivad mem ham 6 mah se khali bithaya gaya. Nai company mem utpadan karvana, thekedarom dwara bahar se kaam karvana aur hamara vetan bhi nahim diya. Hamne kaam manga to management dwara hamem koi javab nahim. Hamem hisab nahim, kaam aur tankhvah cahie, sath hi Dipavali ka bonus.*

## WE DON'T WANT FINAL SETTLEMENTS, WE WANT WORK AND WAGES

We are skilled workers. Through our own efforts and ideas we have brought about increases in production and quality. The punishment for this is that thanks to a dispute between the proprietors we have been made to sit idle for six months. The company now gets production done in a new factory, and also via outside contractors. We have asked for work but we have yet to get an answer from management. We don't want our final settlements. We want work, wages, and our Divali bonus.