



A Ukrainian engineer who claims he was forced to work for 14 years at a Pathum Thani factory for virtually no pay has rejected an offer of 150,000 baht to settle the case.

Anatoliy Vdovychenko, 57, said he met the factory owner at the Labour Protection Welfare Department's Pathum Thani office on Friday, accompanied by a Ukrainian consul staff member.

Police at Pathum Thani's Khlong Luang have charged the owner of Navanakorn Gas (2005) Co factory with hiring a foreign worker illegally and violating the labour law by not paying him wages.

Mr Vdovychenko _ who is asking for full compensation of about five million baht _ said labour officials told him he was eligible only for up to two years' pay. He says his original contract was for 30,000 baht a month plus expenses. The factory owner, who says the engineer's wage was 8,000 baht a month, offered 150,000 baht on the spot to settle the case.

"He agreed to pay only 150,000 baht so I didn't accept it," Mr Vdovychenko said.

He was released from the factory on Jan 11 after consular staff confronted the owner and threatened to call the police.

They acted after a Burmese worker at the factory sent a letter to Mr Vdovychenko's family in the Ukraine telling them of the engineer's plight.

The Department of Special Investigation (DSI) on Thursday said they had located and interviewed the Burmese man at his Samut Prakan home. They reportedly said the worker, who has left the factory, said Mr Vdovychenko was not intimidated, threatened or confined while working at the factory.

However, the Bangkok Post Sunday interviewed the man, Ngwe Win, on three occasions last week during which he said he stood by the allegations that Mr Vdovychenko was held against his will and forced to work at the factory. "They [the DSI officers] asked me many questions, but they didn't write it all down. They write little," said Ngwe Win.

When asked directly if he had said that the engineer was not threatened and forced to work he replied: "No, I don't talk like this."

He said Mr Vdovychenko was allowed to leave the factory for short periods and sometimes he loaned him his bicycle to go to the local shops to buy food.

Ngwe Win returned to Burma on Friday, saying he was afraid that his personal details would be passed on to the factory owner. "I know he's [Mr Vdovychenko] afraid, I'm afraid too," he said.

"I told them [the DSI] already I'm afraid, they said, 'Don't worry, don't be afraid.'"

Ukrainian consul Constantine Ivaschenko said he would submit Ngwe Win's letter to the DSI next week and ask to see a copy of the Burmese worker's statement, which was signed by Ngwe Win and made out in English.

"This letter does not correlate with this testimony. Either the letter is bad or this testimony is wrong," he said.

"If he sent the letter before, why should he tell [them] another thing?" Mr Ivaschenko said if they did not receive a satisfactory answer, the consul would consider pursuing the case in the courts.

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