

International

News

# U.S. Department of Labor flags Indian shrimp for forced labor concerns

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The U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) added Indian shrimp to its “List of Goods Produced by Child Labor or Forced Labor,” raising concerns about the working conditions within India’s shrimp industry. This biennial list, maintained by the Bureau of International Labor Affairs (ILAB), aims to increase public awareness and encourage foreign governments to address labor abuses. The addition of Indian shrimp to the list comes after a series of investigative reports by the Corporate Accountability Lab, the Associated Press, and the Outlaw Ocean Project, which uncovered troubling conditions in India’s shrimp supply chain.

These reports revealed issues such as child labor, forced labor, and inhumane working conditions in Indian shrimp processing facilities, particularly in Andhra Pradesh. The Southern Shrimp Alliance (SSA), an organization representing shrimp producers in the U.S., played a key role in pushing for the inclusion of Indian shrimp on the DOL’s list. They cited the same reports as evidence of labor exploitation in the industry.

The shrimp processing plants in India are said to operate under extremely poor conditions, with workers facing significant hardships. ILAB’s report highlights instances of debt bondage, where workers are charged high job-placement fees that leave them trapped in financial servitude. Many workers are forced to live in employer-provided housing near the worksites, often located in remote areas, with security measures that include lock-ins and surveillance, restricting their freedom of movement.

In addition to the physical abuse and verbal harassment reported, workers are exposed to hazardous chemicals, endure long hours of standing, and face the risk of injury due to the lack of proper protective equipment. Housing conditions are described as overcrowded, unsanitary, and poorly maintained.

One of the more prominent revelations came from Josh Farinella, a former general manager of the shrimp processing company Choice Canning in Kerala, India. Farinella became a whistleblower after witnessing firsthand the poor conditions at the facility. He recounted instances of antibiotic-contaminated shrimp being shipped to the U.S. and employees being forced to stay at the facility against their will. Despite these allegations, Choice Canning has denied any wrongdoing, stating that they have passed social compliance audits and asserting that forced labor does not exist in India’s shrimp industry.

The addition of Indian shrimp to the ILAB’s list has significant implications for the U.S. shrimp market. The Southern Shrimp Alliance has urged all U.S. buyers to exercise due diligence when sourcing shrimp from India, potentially impacting the reputation and demand for Indian seafood in the global market.

India’s shrimp industry is a major player in global seafood exports, contributing billions to the country’s economy. However, the reports of labor abuses have put the industry under intense scrutiny. With shrimp being such a valuable export, this new designation could result in increased regulatory measures and stricter import controls by countries like the U.S., which prioritize ethical sourcing practices.

The case of [Indian shrimp](#) serves as a stark reminder of the human cost behind global food supply chains. As the world demands sustainable and ethical seafood production, it is essential for industries to adopt transparent practices that protect workers’ rights, improve working conditions, and ensure that forced labor and child labor are eradicated. Collaborative efforts between governments, companies, and consumers are crucial in building a seafood industry that values both human rights and environmental sustainability.

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