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Five to ten workers in every garment factory test positive for Covid-19



By Rathindra Kuruwita

About five to ten workers tested positive for COVID-19 every day at every garment factory, Chamila Thushari of the Dabindu Collective that works on garment factory workers' rights told *The Island* yesterday

She said that though garment factories remained open during the lockdown, a significant number of COVID infections had been detected in them.

“Politicians and business leaders insist that garment factories need to remain open to keep the economy going. This is true, we earn a lot of foreign revenue for the country. Recently, the Central Bank of Sri Lanka said that the value of textile and garment exports increased by 28% year-on-year to \$2.5 billion in January to June 2021. The companies also increased profits in 2020 as well. However, the garment workers are compelled to operate in an unsafe environment,” she said.

Thushari said that during the first wave of COVID-19 the factory owners, for the most part, had followed health guidelines. " Only 50% of the workforce was brought in. However, since then the situation has changed.

"Disinfection of factory premises is not taking place. Workers are not given surgical masks and they have been forced to wear cloth masks that aren't very effective. Almost everyone is brought in for work and when they get sick or have to quarantine, the workers are left to their own devices in most instances," she said.

Five garment workers had died and a large number of them were facing COVID-19 related complications, Thushari said. The labour activist asserted that most of the garment factory workers were under 30 years and therefore had not been vaccinated.

"There is hardly any testing to identify cases as well. Although the factories have made colossal profits the salaries of workers have been reduced. The company owners are gaining but the workers are losing," she said.

Meanwhile, College of Medical Laboratory Science (CMLS) President, Ravi Kumudesh told *The Island* that they were capable of testing all garment workers and issue reports within a few days, if the government gave the green light.

"We have been warning of infection clusters around garment factories for almost a year. We understand that it is necessary to keep these factories open, but the lives of their workers matter more than anything else. From what we hear, a significant number of factories now face labour shortages because most workers have tested COVID-19 positive."