
HEARTBEAT OF THE NATION

MYANMAR TIMES

Workers have accused garment factories of using the COVID-19 outbreak as an excuse to temporarily shut down, thus avoiding labour disputes.

They said that about 20 Yangon factories had filed closure notices due to a lack of raw materials from China, where the severe outbreak of the viral disease started.

Ma Khine Zar, a labour representative on the National Committee for Setting the Minimum Wage, called for an investigation of the factories, most of which had labour disputes.

“They can close though the authorities should verify whether they are really affected by coronavirus,” she said. She cited the case of the Hwashin Time garment factory and Lucky Sky bag factory in Yangon, which recently shut down due to alleged shortages of raw materials. Both were having labour problems.

A garment factory in Ayeyarwady Region that was also facing a labour dispute closed without advance notice due to an alleged materials shortage.

U Myat Thin Aun of the Hlaing Tharyar Economic Zone Committee said the factories were having difficulties because the flow of raw materials from China had been disrupted by the Chinese government’s travel restrictions to contain the virus.

“It is hard for the factories, as the raw materials don’t arrive in time and they have a lot of workers,” he said. “The factories would have trouble paying all the workers compensation. They will shut down only for one or two months.”

He said the committee asked the government to approve the shutdown but had received no reply. “The factories are using the last of their raw materials.”

Ma Khine Zar said that about a half a million workers depend on the cut-make-pack garment industry.

“We need planning for them not to end up unemployed,” she said.

Garment factory owners expect the regular flow of materials to resume within two weeks, or by the end of March.

However, they warned that if the shortage drags on, layoffs, temporary closures, or shutdowns could be inevitable.

The Union of Myanmar Federation of Chambers of Commerce and Industry is preparing a 10-point action plan for the government to deal with the adverse economic effects of COVID-19.

These include postponing the review of the national minimum wage and providing unemployment benefits for affected workers as stipulated in the 2012 Social Security Law. –

Translated