

Workers protest over non-payment of wages, forced dismissal

KARACHI: A large number of factory workers, daily wage earners and labourers of different industrial units staged a protest demonstration in Korangi Industrial Area on Monday, questioning the role of the state in the wake of coronavirus pandemic and subsequent lockdown that had left millions of people jobless with no assistance from the state.

They also condemned the non-payment of wages and forced dismissal of thousands of workers, calling it a blatant violation of the government's proclamations.

They warned that if injustice to the workers was not stopped the protest could spread from streets to the siege of residences and offices of the authorities.

The protest demonstration was organised by the National Trade Union Federation of Pakistan (NTUF) and the Home-Based Women Workers Federation (HBWWF) at Bilal Chowrangi, Korangi Industrial Area Addressing the protesters, Nasir Mansoor, the NTUF secretary general, said that the forced dismissals of workers had become a norm and hundreds of thousands had lost their jobs.

Industrialists blamed for violating government's order that protects jobs of employees

"It is the holy month of Ramazan and Eid is about to come but factory owners continue to refuse to pay wages to workers despite government announcements," he said. "The workers and their families are starving. More than 10 million people of this country are on the verge of abject poverty and hunger," he said.

The Sindh government, he said, had promised to protect the jobs and wages of the workers during the lockdown and it issued a notification, but the industrialist had flouted it.

"Some employers are taking undue advantage of the crisis by firing workers who have been employed for decades under the guise of coronavirus and forcing them to work ... under the illegal contract system," he said.

Zahra Khan, the HBWWF general secretary, told the participants of the demonstration that the government, its institutions and factory owners had failed to protect the basic rights of the people, especially the workers, while international brands were also playing a "criminal" role.

"The running orders are being cancelled, which is spreading poverty, unemployment and social unrest not only in Pakistan but also in South Asia. The direct responsibility lies with the brands and the western countries," she added.