

# **Sri Lanka: In letter to Presidential candidates: Five TUs raise concerns**

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**In a letter to Presidential candidates, Anura Kumara Dissanayake, Gotabaya Rajapaksa, and Sajith Premadasa, five trade unions stated they had not paid attention to over two million employees in the formal private sector, and to those in the informal private sector, such as the private commuter transport service, trishaw drivers, small cafes and canteens, shopping complexes, security guards in private security services, and contract employees in manpower agencies, that total around eight million in all.**

The trade unions in question are the Sri Lanka Nidahas Sevaka Sangamaya, the Free Trade Zones and General Services Employees Union, the Ceylon Mercantile, Industrial and General Workers Union, the United Federation of Union Labour and the National Union of Seafarers Sri Lanka.

The salaries of employees in the private sector who earn foreign exchange through their contribution in production and services have been kept at a minimum monthly wage level of Rs 10,000. Along with the Budget relief allowance of Rs 3,500, they earn only Rs 13,500 per month. Working conditions in the private sector are not very conducive too.

According to recent statistics, there are about 74,000 vacancies for Machine Operators in garment factories.

Demands made for these employees, the unions stated, included: whether the candidates would make it mandatory for employers to adhere to and implement International Labour Organisation (ILO) Conventions 87 (Freedom of Association and Protection of the Right to Organise) and 98 (Right to Organise and Collective Bargaining); whether they would agree to submit a draft National Labour Policy to the public and private sector trade unions; whether they would take steps to increase the minimum monthly salary to Rs 25,000, and also adjust the cost of living allowance once in every two years in line with the cost of living; whether they would take measures to include a permanent representation of workers in the management of the Employees Provident Fund; whether they would take steps to ratify ILO Convention 190 on all type of violence at the workplace and have laws enacted accordingly, and also appoint a lady officer with legal powers at Free Trade Zones and at the District level to accept complaints with strict confidentiality and investigate sexual harassment; whether they will refrain from bringing the proposed Single Labour Law; whether they will refrain from drafting laws to import labour for jobs, our youth should be employed in, unless they are specialised employment where we don't have qualified personnel; whether they would take immediate steps to withdraw the proposed Anti Terrorism Act; whether they would reorganise the Department of Labour for efficiency and to bring about industrial peace with a new Industrial Policy; and whether they would take immediate steps to present to the Parliament all Acts that by now have Cabinet of Ministers approval prohibiting employees on subcontract for permanent positions, ensuring health safety and decide the retirement age of private sector employees as 60 years.

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