

Govt. denies exploitation of girls under Sumangali scheme

- Special Correspondent

The State government on Tuesday rejected a DMK legislator's charge that girls were being exploited by textile mills after being employed under the *Sumangali Thittam* or camp coolie system. The *Sumangali Thittam* under which minor girls are employed as labourers in textile mills on the promise of helping them financially to get married, has been widely criticised in the past. However, Textiles Minister O. S. Manian insisted in the Assembly that there was no such exploitation of women workers and added that there was no bonded-labourer in the State.

Participating in the debate for demand for grants to the Textiles Department, DMK MLA T.M. Anbarasan (Alandur) alleged that the *Sumangali Thittam* was in vogue in Tamil Nadu. He said women were employed under this scheme in textile mills for three years initially on the promise that a lump sum would be disbursed at the end of the third year but these workers were put through hard working conditions.

"They are being given low wages and they had to face hardships," he alleged. Certain other charges made by the DMK legislator about the working conditions of these women workers in the textile mills were expunged by Speaker P. Dhanapal.

Responding to the allegation, the Textile Minister said that under the leadership of AIADMK general secretary and Chief Minister Jayalalithaa, there was no *kothadimai* (bonded labourer) in the State.

Mr. Manian added that *kothadimai* meant those whose movement was restricted and were cut off from contacting the outer world but these workers had the freedom of movement and were able to make calls to their relatives.

Labour Minister Nilofer Kafeel too said that the scheme was not in practice in the State. She added that the Madras High Court's recent directions over the *Sumangali* scheme were being implemented by the State government.