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# 60,000 contract workers jobless

By *Sutanuka Ghosal*, ET Bureau | Updated: Dec 22, 2016, 10:57 AM IST

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Several of them now assemble under the banyan tree every morning to discuss ways to earn something and feed their families.

JAGATBALLAVPUR/HOWRAH: On a sunny winter morning, tens of mostly young people are engaged in an intense discussion under a banyan tree at Jagatballavpur in Howrah, some 50 km from down town Kolkata. It's another gloomy morning for Jagatballavpur, home to some 60,000 contract workers, almost all of whom have lost their jobs in the aftermath of the government's demonetisation move.

"Everything was going smoothly till Nov 8," said Sheikh Samai, who was engaged in cutting and sewing of women fashion garments at a fashion house in Santa Cruz, Mumbai.

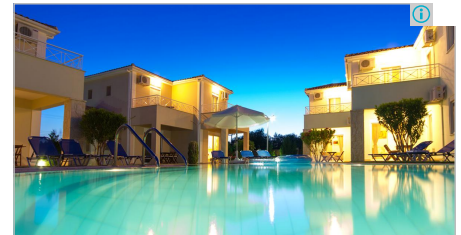
"Next day when I went to the factory my manager told me that there will be problem in cash supply and orders may come down. I continued till Nov 21. Then my employer told me that I have to leave as there was very little work," he said.

from big cities such as Mumbai, Delhi and Kolkata as fashion houses cut production. A number of Jagatballavpur villagers, mostly from the minority community, have been into embroidery, zari work and tailoring, and their work is appreciated all over the country. Now, almost all local units have shut shops due to lack of demand, leaving almost the entire village jobless.

Villagers say that till November 20, around 10 matadors would come to their village to pick up garments to supply to Kolkata markets. "It has stopped from the third week of November. Wholesalers say there is no demand for garments now," said Nasirul Islam who stitches garments for a Kolkata wholesaler.

Several of them now assemble under the banyan tree every morning to discuss ways to earn something and feed their families.

"There is a lot of tension at home and this results in fights with family members," said Sheikh Ramzan, 40, who has been tailoring garments for wholesalers in Kolkata's Metiaburuz, Manglahat and Howrah markets for the



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last 24 years. He has been earning Rs 2,000 every week. These people are hopeful that the tide will turn by the month end. Everybody , as Samai said, is "eagerly waiting for a call" from their employer. "We will wait till December 30," said Sheik Jamir.

"We feel this is a short-term pain which will lead to a long-term gain for all of us. Till such time we will bear this pain," said Jamir who is engaged in sewing readymade garments. As of now, the pain seems to be getting worse. The neighbourhood grocer, who sold everyday items to villagers on credit in the initial days, now refuses to do it anymore.

"Prices of pulses is Rs 120 per kg. How long can I continue to give credit on these items? " said the grocer. Those who have some agricultural land are finding it difficult to sow rabi crop as credit line from local cooperative society has dried up.

"Rice millers have told us they will give Rs 1,200 per quintal for our paddy if we accept old notes. If we don't, then they are offering Rs 1,000 per quintal which is same as our cost of production. It is a distress sale for us. We are no getting loan for rabi crop from cooperative society" said Rafikul Ali, who owns 2,680 sqm, of agriculture land.

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