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Fashion designers say cost of production up due to import restrictions

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The fashion designers are struggling to keep up with the fast-changing trends in the country, as the challenges in sourcing raw materials have led to a slowdown in reacting to the market demand.

While boutique designer wear continues to gain popularity in the country, especially since an import ban was imposed on manufactured garments, the import restrictions on raw material such as fabric and accessories are adding to the woes of the locally established fashion brands. "The change in trend happened so fast that the designers are unable to cope.

Smaller businesses are unable to adapt to the change as by the time the designers have adjusted, the customers have moved on to a new trend," said Design Collective Co-Founder Binu Wickramasinghe addressing a webinar on apparel sector recovery, held this week.

According to the experience of Design Collective, a store that houses over 60 local clothing and accessory brands, import restrictions have compelled businesses to source locally, which have in turn increased their cost of production, leaving designers to deal with an impractical situation.

"Restricting everything doesn't help any of us. Maintaining a balance is imperative. It is important to take into account the struggles of smaller businesses as they have to put up with a bigger struggle to survive during a crisis," asserted Wickramasinghe.

She also pointed out that although the government assured the extension of relief packages to businesses to meet their expenditure to stay afloat, mainly payroll, the smaller and micro players in the apparel sector are not at the receiving end of such assistance.

Wickramasinghe shared that banks are not keen on lending to the SME and micro players in the industry without "massive" collateral.

"During a crisis such as the pandemic, we do not have such monetary support to give as collateral. We managed to pull thought but that may not have been the case for others," she said.

Meanwhile, according to Wickramasinghe, the impact of the second wave partial lockdown was heavier than the first for SMEs and businesses are yet to bounce back from the implications.

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