The Little Things that Matter

ELITA KARIM

Even after the strict implementation of the compliance law in 2006, ensuring the working conditions of the manufacturing unit from social, political and economic points of view, there was still a lot left to desire for scores of workers in the Ready Made Garment (RMG) sector. In several factories, even today, minimum labour standards like wages, working hours, over time, safety in the workplace, job security, right to form trade union, ensuring non-violation of human rights and social benefits are still merely concepts on paper. In an industry comprising of over 4,000 factories of which 90% are SMEs and which also play a big role in creating economic opportunities for women, internal factory policies like production bonus, cash incentives, working conditions, maternity leave, medical facilities, arrangement for food including safe drinking water, a place to pray, transportation, festival bonus and much more are enough to unleash a fresh surge of labour unrest.





There are still quite a number of RMG factories in the city, which do not follow the compliance law.

In November 2007, a Human Resource Restructuring (HRR) programme was piloted simultaneously in five factories on a cost-sharing basis, where a yearlong training programme was planned for mid-level managers and workers. The International Finance Corporation's South Asia Enterprise Development Facility (IFC-SEDF) in Bangladesh is currently working in the RMG sector to preserve and increase jobs while stimulating growth and improving working and environmental conditions. In partnership with two leading brands, Gap and H&M, along with the five leading RMG factories, they developed the curriculum for the HRR programme. A leading local consulting firm DCGCI (Development Consultant and Global Compliance Initiative) was awarded the contract for conducting the programme. "The HRR programme initiated a process to bring about sustainable improvement in the workers- management relationship," says Nayeem Emran, Task Manager, IFC-SEDF.

Upon interaction with key industry stakeholders, IFC-SEDF identified that other than wages, one of the other most critical causes of labour unrest is the communication breakdown between the mid-level managers and workers. For instance, for 25-year-old Laisu Rehman who now works at FS Sweaters as a Linking Operator, says, "I used to work in another factory where I had to miss several days of classes and exams only because I had no idea if I could take leave." He continues, "Besides, I was not sure who to approach and how to go about applying for study leave, since the senior officers never seemed to have time to spare. It would have been a long process, which is why I let go of it and lagged behind in