cancells 5 per cent profit sharing of workers; in its place it includes a new clause having a welfare board and welfare fund. Workers fear that the owner will deprive them of their rights of getting a welfare fund. They fear losing the jobs as the law says that an employer can terminate a worker for any misconduct and the worker will not be able to receive any kind of benefits.

The Parliamentary Standing committee's recommendation about gratuity says that a worker will get 18 months benefit if s/he completes eight years work in a factory but the amended law dictates that a worker will get 30 days benefit if he works eight years or more. Labour activists say that the workers do not remain in the same place for such a long time. So it is quite difficult for them to be a beneficiary by the law.

Sultana knows nothing about the amended law--all she wants is a better work place and proper compensation. "We thought the government and the garment owners will come forward to help, but they do not even come to see us. We are passing very hard life here. Maybe within a few days we will have to move to our village in Chandpur," she adds.



PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

Labour activist Kolpona believes that the amended law is a weapon to weaken the trade union movement.



PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

However, the workers allege that the owners are reluctant to invest in the improvement of the working environment of the factories and are not serious about paying proper compensation. According to Bangladesh Institute of Labour Studies, 2600 people died in the last two decades but the owners did not take adequate steps to make a safe place for workers.

The government, however, has introduced a new act called the Compensation Act-2005, in which the factory owners are responsible to bring workers under group insurance coverage. However, citing BGMEA statistics, labour leaders claim that over 1,200 export-oriented garment factories of the country don't have group insurance. A labour leader on anonymity tells the Star, "Garments industry owners and the related apex organisations are reluctant to bring the workers under the insurance coverage. After the Compensation Act-2005 is activated, in the last eight years the scenario remains in the same place as it was in 2005.

A BGMEA insider discloses that in 2005, the BGMEA, through a circular,