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Rahimafrooz widens CSR outreach

Its group director shares various CSR activities with The Daily Star

Suman Saha



Niaz Rahim

Rahimafrooz, one of the most renowned conglomerates in the country, aims to impact communities and the environment positively through pursuing sustainable social activities.

Headquartered in Dhaka the company puts due emphasis on corporate social responsibility (CSR) as it aims to be a socially and environmentally responsible organisation.

“We want to enrich our society by pursuing sustainable CSR activities,” said Niaz Rahim, group director of Rahimafrooz, in an interview with The Daily Star recently.

He said his company spends around Tk 8 crore on average per year for CSR activities as it has plans to behave as a responsible corporate entity.

Rahim, who is also the managing director of Rahimafrooz Superstores Ltd, said his company works mainly in three areas -- environmental consciousness, human capacity development, and health -- under its CSR activities.

The business conglomerate generally carries out its CSR activities through its Rural Services Foundation (RSF), a not-for-profit social initiative.

The RSF is committed to working in all areas of environment, social and human development including community development, economic and business development, conventional and renewable energy, Rahim said.

The RSF has so far installed more than 2.20 lakh solar home systems out of which 1,286 small SHSs have been installed for lower-income people by its 482 unit offices across the country.

“Through these SHSs, around 4,000 tonnes of kerosene are saved per year which helps in protecting environment positively,” said Rahim.

The Foundation has so far constructed 1,000 biogas plants across the country to reduce air pollution through saving biomass and firewood for cooking.

It has constructed more than 4,850 improved cooking stoves (ICS) in the cyclone Sidr affected areas to minimise indoor pollution through cutting on the use of biomass.

Rahimafrooz undertakes several other activities to develop human capacity by offering both residential and non-residential education for ultra-poor students free of cost under its CSR programme.

Currently, it runs one residential school and college in Bogra and a non-residential educational institute in Dhaka.

It provides residential education at RSF Model School and College in Bogra for children from ultra poor families who live in monga (famine condition) affected areas', said Rahim.

He said from a total of 176 beneficiary families there, every child is provided with food, clothing and quality education free of cost.

The business conglomerate also carries out other programmes such as providing free basic education, balanced nutritious food and medical support to the needy under its 'The Dhaka Project'.

Since the launch of the project in 2005, it supported a total of 500 underprivileged children through providing basic education, food and medical services, Rahim said.

The RSF also operates four IT centres in Cox's Bazar, Chandpur, Satkhira and Jhenaidah for the development of human resources in rural areas. The centres have so far trained up 1,791 youths and 77 staff of the RSF, he said.

Rahimafrooz, founded in 1954 by late AC Abdur Rahim as a trading company in Dhaka, now operates in four broad segments -- storage power, automotive electronics, energy and retail.

The group today has thirteen operating companies, including four joint venture companies and a non-profit social enterprise.

According to the group director, the company boasts around 4,600 full-time employees and nearly 1,000 contractual and part-time employees. Its employee turnover rate is less than 10 percent.

Rahimafrooz, with its annual sales of around Tk 1,800 crore, has been growing at more than 20 percent in the last few years, said Rahim.

He said the company is very much concerned about the environmental issues. The group, therefore, focuses on protecting the environment through using modern technology in the factories, he added.

All the battery manufacturing units of Rahimafrooz comply with relevant environmental laws of the land, he said.

“We have effluent treatment plants, air treatment plants and acid fume scrubber units in all factories to treat effluents and air,” said Rahim.

He said all lead containing items are recycled to reclaim lead, which is reused in battery manufacturing process.

Rahimafrooz Battery Ltd has already set up a smelting plant for the purpose of lead recycling. “We can produce around 500 tonnes of lead annually from this plant through recycling,” said Rahim.

To enhance environmental awareness among the youths, the RSF also organises Paribesh Utshab (environment carnival) every year through arranging rallies and quiz competitions for students across the country.

Around 30,000 students have been part of this campaign since 2008 and a total of 1,550 students have received the award, said Rahim.

The project will directly inspire the future leaders to influence the broader community to take immediate actions at individual and organisation level, he added.

Rahimafrooz is also a signatory to the UN Global Compact. It supports the ten principles of the Global Compact in respect to human rights, labour rights, the protection of the environment and anticorruption, said Rahim.

Corporate taxpayers now enjoy 10 percent tax rebate for CSR donation up to Tk 8 crore subject to a limit of 20 percent of their income.

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