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One crore new jobs in Textile Sector by 3 years

IN less than two months of taking charge in the Textiles Ministry, Smriti Irani is at loggerheads with her most senior bureaucrat Rashmi Verma with even the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) stepping in to resolve the differences.

She has, sources told The Indian Express, issued more than two dozen notes over the last two days, seeking Textiles Secretary Verma's response on a range of issues — from the procedural and the administrative to those related to policy. Sources said Irani was, for instance, upset with a file not being sent directly to her but being routed via Verma.

Both are also said to have disagreed over certain aspects of the Rs 6,000-crore apparel and textiles package cleared by the Cabinet on June 22 and preparations for a textile summit which was scheduled to be held in October. Irani even had a heated argument with Verma in the presence of other officers, sources added.

When contacted, Verma denied any conflict with the minister. Asked about the notes issued by the Minister, she said, "I do not want to comment on this. It is usual communication. She has sought briefing on certain programmes." Irani did not respond to calls and a text message seeking her comments.

Verma, an IAS officer of 1982 Bihar cadre and sister of Cabinet Secretary P K Sinha, was appointed Textiles Secretary last December. Irani was moved from HRD and assigned the Textiles portfolio on July 5 as part of the Cabinet reshuffle by Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

A senior government official said that Irani had raised the issue of poor follow-up on the textiles and apparel package by senior officers in the ministry during a recent Cabinet meeting. Following this, the PMO called a meeting with the officials including Verma to understand what was holding up the implementation of the mega package aimed at creating 1 crore new jobs in the sector over three years.

The official said that to give effect to the Cabinet decision on the textile package, several notifications were to be issued by other departments including revenue, labour and commerce. “The PMO spoke to the secretaries in these departments as well to expedite the issue of notifications relating to duty drawbacks on textiles products, labour law relaxations, etc,” the official said.