

## Why must RMG sector remain so troubled?

*Address the causes effectively*

**L**AST two days have seen a spate of violence in the RMG factories in Chittagong and Dhaka. The losses incurred due to destruction and vandalism inside the factory has been immense. Not only were factories subjected to the wrath of the workers, the trouble also spilled on to the streets. What is quite disturbing is that a RMG manufacturing company in CEPZ was forced to close down operations completely after some of its factories were damaged by the workers. This situation is absolutely unacceptable.

According to the latest reports, more than 100 persons were injured including 25 members of the law enforcing agencies in clashes between workers and police in Sunday's unrest in factories in Kuril Bishwa Road. The disgruntled workers also vandalised at least 50 vehicles and set fire to three private cars during the two-hour clash, halting vehicular movement on the Airport Road for nearly three and a half hours.

From what we have learned, the problem has stemmed from the issue of implementation of the new pay scale. And there are a few things regarding the new pay that need attention of the government as well as that of the owners. We are told that nearly 95 percent of the industry has implemented the new pay scale. Given that, the complaint of the workers that the new pay scale has in fact seen reduction in the total pay package for some section of the workers, as in the case of Youngone in CTG, and that the increase has been a merely of TK 500 in total, as in the case of Nasa Group workers, must be addressed dispassionately.

One wonders why the situation has come to such a pass. It is difficult to understand how one's pay can go down after agreement on an enhanced rate of pay and allowances? While there is no reason for the owners not to implement the new pay scale, it was important for them to explain to the workers what the total emolument would be and the rationale for it under the new arrangement. It should be remembered that the pay scale was agreed to by all the parties, and if there is any lacunae it should have been detected before finalising.

The recent violence brings into focus the question of management of the workers in the garment factories in general. In the case of Youngone it was, as we understand, a case of adjusting the interim monetary relief provided as a temporary measure before the new pay scale was announced. Apparently, there is little or no communication between the management and workers to clarify issues, particularly those dealing with the pay and welfare of the workers.

We have had enough of unrest in the RMG sector. For the industry to continue to suffer even after enhanced pay for the workers is unacceptable.

## The climate after Cancun

*Fresh hope arises, after Copenhagen chaos*

**T**HE good news about climate and its changing patterns and how nations cope with it is that there is fresh new ground for hope. What has transpired in Cancun is something quite removed from the stalemate and chaos which descended on Copenhagen at this time last year. Where miffed and shocked negotiators simply could not understand why nothing was working in Copenhagen, this time around matters appear to be rather under control. There is certainly nothing of the dramatic sort that has occurred in Cancun, of course, but after Copenhagen there appears to have been a conscious effort made toward avoiding the old mistakes.

Watch the results thrown up by Cancun. A new fund, called the Green Climate Fund, involving billions of dollars to aid poor nations fight off the effects of industrial emissions has been agreed upon. The United States, Japan and the European Union have made pledges of 100 billion dollars a year beginning in 2020, along with 30 billion dollars in what has been described as rapid assistance. Affluent countries are required to cut emissions by 25 to 40 per cent by 2020. Developing nations will be assisted, through new market mechanisms, in curbing gas emissions. Surely one of the significant results emerging from the conference is the wide support that has been voiced regarding a saving of the world's forest regions from destruction. The draft anti-deforestation regulations developing nations have been asked to prepare speaks not only of the persistent threat to the environment but also of the serious approach being made to contain the threat. Finally, the move by the conference to disseminate technical know-how to developing nations on containing emissions and adapting to climate change is indicative of the seriousness with which climate change is being tackled.

So the deal is there and everything now ought to fall in place. That is the feeling. Not quite, though. What is now required is systematic and foolproof monitoring of the implementation of the agreement. Not all of the goals set out in the deal will be fully implemented before next year's talks in South Africa. But given that a sense of common worry has been at work in Cancun, it is reasonable to expect that a more substantive target will be set - and achieved - next year.



## The Cancun climate deal

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SYED FATTAHUL ALI

**S**OME good news could finally be heard from Cancun, the Mexican tourist resort where the 16th Conference of the Parties (COP) under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), or in short, UN climate change conference, was held between November 29 and December 11 to reach an international deal on cutting carbon emissions by the member countries.

The COP is the highest body of the UNFCCC and comprises environment ministers from 193 countries. Since the first summit on Climate Change, known as Earth Summit, held in Rio de Janeiro in 1992, this is the 16th time that such conference was organised by ministers and other senior officials from these countries.

But why are the nations committed to reduce the emission of the Green House Gases, (GHGs) such as carbon dioxide (CO2) methane (CH4), nitrous oxide (N2O), sulphur hexafluoride (SF6) as well as the chlorofluorocarbons [hydrofluorocarbons (HFC) and perfluorocarbons (PFC)] -- the gases to blame for Global Warming -- are taking so long to reach a consensus on the deal?

It may be recalled here that on

December 11 1997 ministers and other high-level officials from 160 countries reached an agreement in Kyoto of Japan on a legally binding Protocol under which 37 industrialised countries were to reduce their collective emissions of greenhouse gases by 5.2% from the 1991 level. The agreement, termed Kyoto Protocol, came into force on February 16, 2005.

Though the protocol set the target of lowering overall emissions of the six GHGs over a five-year period between 2008 and 2012, little progress could be made so far in achieving the set targets of collective carbon emissions. Rich countries, including Japan, which hosted the conference, and Russia showed their unwillingness to enter a second term of the protocol after 2012 at the Cancun climate change summit. At a stage, Canada also refused to renew the legally binding protocol.

The situation turned for the worse as United States backed out on the agreement to constitute a Green Fund. It insisted on progress on all the issues in the talks, including reducing de-forestation (Redd) and technology, and threatened to withhold support for the agreement unless conditions on verifying emissions reduction by emerging economies like China and India are met.

Finally, after two hectic weeks of negoti-

ations a modest deal could be reached, paving the way for the next round of talks (COP17) in South Africa in December next year to decide whether the already frayed Kyoto protocol could be extended further. However, the progress made at Cancun, though not ambitious, if only due to the sobering impact of last year's Copenhagen summit (COP15) that began with high hopes but ended in a whimper, did at least set the course for future climate talks. Not surprisingly, the chairman of the Cancun climate talks, Mexican foreign minister Patricia Espinosa, declared with a positive note that the deal has ushered in a new era of international cooperation on climate change.

- The most important achievement is the agreement on creating the Green Climate Fund for the poorest and worst-affected countries to adapt to the harmful impacts of climate change. The wealthiest nations such as the European Union, Japan and the United States have pledged \$100 billion a year from 2020 to the Green Climate Fund, with a rapid fund of \$30 billion to start with,
- Next comes the new mechanism to transfer low carbon technology and expertise to poor countries,
- The Forest deal with provision of compensation for preserving tropical forests by countries that would avoid emissions from deforestation;
- The urge for deep cuts in carbon emissions so that the global temperature may not rise over 2 degrees Celsius (3.6 Fahrenheit) over the pre-industrial level. It also made a call to carry out a study on the possibility of limiting the rise to 1.5

degrees Celsius;

- To study new market mechanisms that would help developing nations to reduce carbon emissions and discuss the proposals at the next climate talks in South Africa;
- Ensuring that all major emitters including USA and China have their actions inspected;
- Arrange scientific review of the progress made after five years.

All the major powers, who are also the bigger emitters of GHGs -- the USA, the European Union, China, Japan and India -- except the least developed Bolivia extended their support for the deal. Bolivia's contention was that the agreement was not binding on the wealthiest nations to cut their emissions and as a result the global temperature might rise further, even above 4 degrees Celsius, thereby leading to near-death situation for more humans. Bolivia's resistance was finally overcome as it had no veto power to torpedo the climate deal. a

As noted earlier, the Cancun deal is a modest one in that it has no mechanism to measure how far the overall global omissions could be cut. What is more, there are a lot of loopholes in the agreement through which deep cuts in carbon emissions could be avoided. Ironically, such drastic cuts in the emission of climate altering gases were the sine qua non for containing global warming, as argued by scientists and it is also for this very purpose that the climate talks were initiated.

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## The profit and loss of noise

Noise is essential to the system. Excess, however, grates. There is a clash of civilisations when the throat threatens to destroy the eardrum. Democracy works when all five sense are in harmony. Mukherjee's diagnosis was perfect, but his prescription was, shall we say, a bit ambiguous. He advised a bit of silence.

M.J. AKBAR

**I**T is entirely appropriate that the man in charge of India's volume control, Pranab Mukherjee, should have uttered what is unarguably the comment of the year: our democracy has become too noisy. Through a long career stretching from the 1960s, Pranab (as he is fondly known) has always preferred the brain to the lung. Noise has been neither in his temperament nor his bhadralok-Brahmin culture.

His metier is ministerial; he is a fish out of water when his party is in opposition. He knows that government has a tremendous advantage in the parliamentary form of government, even more so than in the presidential form, but only if it knows the mechanism of power. He would be the first to appreciate that opposition very often has no option except to play its first and last card, noise.

Noise has become a pejorative term, which is unfair. Noise does not have to be necessarily loud. Oratory is beautiful noise. Music is noise touched by magic. Politics rarely rises to oratory, and never to music,

but every opposition knows that while it cannot survive if it is not heard, it must trade with the voter in intelligible noise. Rising decibel levels can be justified only if there is the logic of public interest at the core.

The delicate twist that lifts Mukherjee's statement from the passé to the extraordinary is a descriptive qualification, "a bit too." Noise is essential to the system. Excess, however, grates. There is a clash of civilisations when the throat threatens to destroy the eardrum. Democracy works when all five sense are in harmony. Mukherjee's diagnosis was perfect, but his prescription was, shall we say, a bit ambiguous. He advised a bit of silence.

The virtues of silence can never be overstated. Silence breeds reflection and reflection encourages maturity. If that was Mukherjee's advice to opposition, then it had some merit. But it is equally within the opposition's rights to point out that government very often treats silence in precisely the same manner as an accused -- as its first line of defence. In any criminal case, police have to give an accused the legal

right of silence, so that he does not incriminate himself.

Both Prakash Karat of the CPI(M) and Arun Jaitley of the BJP are asking Dr. Manmohan Singh whether he rejects the idea of a JPC because he fears that if he speaks he will incriminate his government in a scandal that continues to have the most astonishing reverberations as layer after surprising layer peels off.

We now learn that government tapped the middlewoman Niira Radia's phones because it believed that she was "indulging in anti-national activities." This takes the allegations against her beyond the edges of conventional corruption, and provides further justification to the opposition demand for a Joint Parliamentary Committee to probe the most sensational scandal in two decades.

It is ironic that government was forced to state this in the Supreme Court because of a petition filed by Radia's chief financial mentor and public guardian, Ratan Tata, the industrialist who has helped Radia's company grow from nothing to Rs.300 crores in just nine years. Acting on poor legal advice, Tata went to court to blanket out information, condemning India as a banana republic along the way. No weapon has ricocheted back faster than the Ratan boomerang.

It may be relevant, therefore, to consider where Pranab Mukherjee asked for a bit of silence. He was speaking to industrialists. While it is axiomatic that there cannot be bribery without money, and where there is money there will be businessmen, the 2G

show is slowly turning into theatre where the lead role in the first act has faded before the aggressive emergence of businessmen on the stage.

Ratan Tata has been dominating headlines with a persistence uncharacteristic of his class. He has been interventionist rather than reticent, often storming into the debate despite overwhelming evidence of sleaze on the part of his protégé. It was only a matter of time before another businessman decided to label this as hypocrisy, which Rajeev Chandrashekar did, albeit more politely. Tata's response was to claim personal virtue in the name of the prime minister, a double-edged tribute which Dr. Singh might want to ignore; and accuse an opposition party, BJP, of association in the exercise.

This might be the moment to point out that Niira Radia's telephones were tapped by the Manmohan Singh government, not the BJP. They were leaked by those in power today, not a BJP mole. If Ratan Tata finds his name in media stories on Indian scams, it is because the present government made the Radia tapes available to media. It is possible that the leaks had Home Minister P. Chidambaram's approval; after all, Home Secretary G.K. Pillai has, on record, promised much more.

Time to understand what Pranab Mukherjee implied: silence begins at home.

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