

RMG sector and our future

Compliance needs to be treated as a national challenge

THE readymade garments sector has been a boon for Bangladesh. It is the mainstay behind our sustained 6 percent plus GDP growth over the years. It has provided millions of jobs both within the industry and those connected with backward linkage. However, the industry's success has come at a cost, which we as a nation and the world as a whole are no longer willing to pay. The cost has been in working conditions and pay. Here also much progress has been made but certainly not enough as was most tragically demonstrated in the death of 111 workers at the Tazreen Fashion factory.

Now BGMEA has announced that they will de-register 850 factories for non-compliance--600 this month and the rest in February. The point we would like to make here is that a similar move was taken in 2002 when 550 factories were thrown out of the trade body, and yet several tragedies occurred over the last 10 years, the worst of which was Tazreen factory fatalities. This clearly shows that the step was not effective. So what guarantee is there that it will be so this time around? There is also the fact that subcontractors do not fall under the direct scrutiny of BGMEA and their factory conditions remain unmonitored.

We would like to clearly state that the deaths of 111 workers has created tremendous sorrow and revulsion among the people of Bangladesh and the world over. Global focus is on us. Both our international buyers and consumers are watching us as to what serious steps we take. Why can't we get into our heads that because of a few delinquents the whole RMG sector is getting a bad name and as such running the risk of losing markets? The present state of workers' safety is far from adequate and management practices in some cases are medieval. Restoring the image and status of our RMG sector should now be considered an urgent national task. The government, the RMG leaders, representatives of RMG workers and all others concerned must urgently put their heads together. No stop-gap measure is likely to work. Prospect of our faster growth depends on it, so does the possibility of employments of millions of additional workers.

We are not sure if adequate attention is being given to the matter.

Shocking US school massacre

It is time to address the core issue

Twenty children, all aged between six and seven, and six women, died in the assault on Sandy Hook school by a young man who then killed himself. Among those was his mother too. We join all in expressing our sorrow to the grieving community in Newtown Connecticut, USA and in sharing their grief.

Such catastrophes, regrettably, are not new to the Americans. They have gone through it too many times. In fact only in 2012 alone there have been 13 mass murders in the US. And all of them involved firearms held legally or illegally, some of which were assault weapons that are being used in many theaters of war today. In fact of the 62 mass murders carried out in the US since 1982, three quarters of the 139 firearms used by the killers, some of who were mentally deranged, were held legally. Of these, more than 60 were semi-automatic handguns and over 30 were assault weapons.

Given that guns are so readily available in the US and the fact that majority of the victims have been unsuspecting children and women, how does the US go about, what President Obama said, "Protecting its children"?

We feel that it was time the US got hold of the bull by the horns. It has to choose between individual safety and collective security. And in a country that has an estimated 300 million guns and that the people are permitted by the constitution to carry guns, the urgency is even more acute. Given that the US National Rifle Association is a very strong lobby against gun control and has the backing of the Republican Party too, and given that there has been a trend of moving away from greater control, it will not be an easy job for President Obama.

However, the US citizens must wake up to the new reality that somehow a strong violent streak has permeated their culture and mass availability of killing machines is threatening their lives rather than providing

Fallout from an attack on Iran



HERE are those in Congress and beyond who advocate for a pre-emptive strike on Iran's nuclear facilities.

The arguments put forward are nothing new. A nuclear-armed Shiite-led Iran that is committed to the destruction of Israel is an unthinkable scenario for western powers. Despite what the hardliners will have us believe, merely attacking the Iranian nuclear infrastructure will not put an end to the programme. Unlike Iraq's now defunct nuclear facility that was taken out by an Israeli air strike in '81, Iran's facilities are widely dispersed. An attack will at best set back the Iranians a few years.

We are still in the "best guess" scenario as to when Iran will be in a position to produce its first bomb. The disastrous Iraq campaign was based on intelligence that portrayed Iraq as being very close to achieving nuclear capability. It led United States into Iraq and found no weapons of mass destruction to speak of. This brings us to the question whether this time round the US should take the same route. Rather, would it not be more judicious to get some real, hard evidence that Iran is on the road to produce the bomb? As pointed out by Colin H. Kahl, Associate Professor in the Security Studies Programme at Georgetown University in a recent article: "According to 2010 Senate testimony by James Cartwright, then vice chairman of the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, and recent statements by the former heads of Israel's national intelligence and defence intelligence agencies, even if Iran could produce enough weapons-grade uranium for a bomb in six months, it would take it at least a year to produce a testable nuclear

device and considerably longer to make a deliverable weapon."

Indeed, they are not the only people of authority who disagree with the "hawks" that Iran poses an imminent threat to world peace. David Albright, President, Institute for Science and International Security, went on record to state that there is a "low probability" of Iran developing a bomb within the next year even in the remote chance that they had the capacity to do so. Apart from Natanz and Qom sites, there are no other known or suspected



An American attack on Iran will certainly fuel anti-US feelings across the region. Several Arab nations have Sunni-minority royalty ruling over Shiite majority populations and containing a multi-nation "Shiite Spring" may prove difficult.

nuclear enrichment plants in Iran. Hence, for the country to produce further weapons-grade uranium would have to go through these plants that are under International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) supervision, and therefore would not go undetected.

Secondly, any covert or overt military action on the nuclear programme would be considered an act of war by the Iranian leadership. It is safe to assume the "retaliation" would come on several fronts. Iran's naval capabilities are dubious. Its

ability to lay thousands of mines is not. Even the temporary closure of the Straits of Hormuz will have economic repercussions in terms of volatility in international oil markets. Hezbollah, which has received Iranian largesse in the past and continues to receive in the present will feel compelled to take up the cause.

A re-ignited Lebanon and a return to civil war cannot be ruled out. And a spilling over of the conflict onto Israel could become a real possibility. In fact, embroiling Israel into a campaign in Lebanon will be

Going into Iran with a multinational "coalition of the willing" may prove infinitely more difficult in today's global economic climate. Europe is in no state to take part in any major military action that will certainly be long-term in nature. Using Iraq as a staging front for an Iran invasion will be a hard sell. That leaves the naval front. Iranians operate 6 modern Russian Kilo-class diesel electric submarines. Iran also operates a significant number of midget submarines and more than a 1,000 small, highly manoeuvrable attack vessels equipped with everything from rocket launchers, anti-ship missiles, torpedoes and more importantly, mine-laying capabilities.

There is little doubt that the US would prevail from a strictly military perspective. But then the question really is at what cost? And precisely what would the US have gained through such a course of action? The central argument for a conflict with Iran inevitably revolves around Israel's security. An Iran under attack will certainly not increase Israel's security, rather endanger it. Make no mistake, unlike the Gulf war in the early '90s, Israel will find itself on the frontlines. Despite the iron dome missile defence system, some of Hezbollah's Iranian-made long range Fajr-3 and Fajr-5 or the Syrian-supplied "Scud" missiles are bound to get through. Israel will respond. And when it does, the geopolitical landscape of the Middle East will undergo a radical transformation. Years of painstaking relationships built up with Arab regimes will be put under severe stress. Today, there are Islamist parties heading major powerhouses in the region including Egypt. Traditional Sunni-Shia distrust and hatred could very well be put aside in the face of what people may perceive to be US aggression and meddling in the region.

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US, N. Korea should stop raising tension

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FTER a failed attempt in April, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) announced the successful launch of its Kwangmyongsong-3 satellite on December 12, which was widely believed to mark the first anniversary of Kim Jong-un's administration since Kim Jong-il died on December 17 last year. However, the launch invited strong reactions from the international community, especially Western countries. Some countries have even accused the DPRK of using its right to launch satellites to cover its missile development programme.

Since the DPRK's withdrawal from the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), the United Nations Security Council has viewed the Korean Peninsula nuclear issue as one endangering international peace and security. The DPRK's nuclear tests in 2006 and 2009 were followed by Security Council resolutions, which demanded that Pyongyang immediately halt its nuclear-related activities and missile programme. The DPRK, however, has insisted that, as a sovereign nation, it has the right to peaceful use of space and launch satellites.

According to the UN Charter, the Security Council is responsible for maintaining international peace and security, and its resolutions are binding on all countries. The Charter also empowers the body to decide whether a dispute or event poses a threat to world peace.

The Security Council's resolutions 1718 and 1874 bind the DPRK to international obligations under the UN Charter. According to Article 103 of the Charter, UN member countries should accord priority to their obligations under the Charter over those in other international covenants.

That means Pyongyang's claim that it enjoys the right to peaceful use of space, which it says is accorded by the Outer Space Treaty, stops short of having a legal basis.

From a legal perspective, Security Council resolutions constitute the core of international law. Different from UN General Assembly resolutions, which lack binding force, Security Council resolutions are legally binding on even non-UN member countries. Thus, Pyongyang has to unconditionally abide by Security Council resolutions that impose a ban on its use of missile technology for launching satellites.

As a widely recognised international treaty on arms reduction, the NPT is aimed at preventing nuclear proliferation, pushing forward nuclear disarmament and promoting international cooperation for peaceful use of nuclear energy.

The Security Council has played an important role in the implementation and monitoring of the treaty. It is also empowered to investigate the activities of the countries that have withdrawn from the NPT and even stop countries from withdrawing in the first place, using military forces if necessary, if it considers the move to be in contravention of the treaty or a threat to international peace.

So Pyongyang's unilateral withdrawal from the NPT does not justify its self-proclaimed exemption from

the treaty's terms and conditions. Besides, the Security Council still has the responsibility of defining its international obligations.

The supreme role of the Security Council in maintaining international peace and security and preventing nuclear proliferation, however, has pushed the United States into an advantageous position in its game with the DPRK. The international community has labelled the DPRK a "rogue state," to a large extent, because Western countries have demonised it. The label, however, is also related to the DPRK's contempt for and violation of Security Council resolutions.

In the diplomatic game over the Korean peninsula nuclear issue, the absence of mutual trust is unlikely to lead to a win-win result. To enhance mutual trust, the US should forego its hegemonic policy, while the DPRK should abide by its international obligations and Security Council resolutions.

Pyongyang's repeated violations of its international obligations are, to a certain extent, its response to the decisions of Washington-manipulated Security Council and International Atomic Energy Agency.

In this sense, US unilateralism has added to the Security Council's difficulties of making the DPRK follow its resolutions.

Despite the Security Council's irreplaceable role in maintaining international peace, its resolutions often create a legal dilemma when they are implemented with the help of or to benefit Washington.

Security Council resolutions are inseparable from the US diplomatic inclinations and sometimes reflect its double standard. Though the US opposes and even threatens to take

military action against the DPRK's satellite launch, it tends to ignore similar actions taken by its allies such as the Naro rocket launch of Republic of Korea (ROK).

Owing to the hostility between the US and the DPRK, there is little or no possibility of the two sides realising their mutual diplomatic goals through bilateral dialogue. Pyongyang considers nuclear weapons to be the most potent deterrent against Washington and for maintaining its national security in the absence of any security guarantee from the US.

The problem is that by extending a security guarantee to the DPRK, the US will forfeit its self-proclaimed right of maintaining military alliances with the ROK and Japan and nullify its pursuit of hegemonism in Asia, which is unacceptable to Washington. On the other hand, without a security guarantee from the US, the DPRK is unlikely to abandon its nuclear programme that in turn will threaten the non-proliferation mechanism, which the US sees as its core interest and diplomatic strategy.

In the diplomatic game over the Korean peninsula nuclear issue, the absence of mutual trust is unlikely to lead to a win-win result. To enhance mutual trust, the US should forego its hegemonic policy, while the DPRK should abide by its international obligations and Security Council resolutions.

China, as a shareholder and Security Council member, should mediate to enhance mutual trust between the US and the DPRK under the Six-Party Talks and try to play a bigger role in the Security Council from passing resolutions that weaken its legitimacy.

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THIS DAY IN HISTORY

December 18

1271

Kublai Khan renames his empire "Yuan" (CE³yuán), officially marking the start of the Yuan Dynasty of Mongolia and China.

1973

The Islamic Development Bank is founded.

1989

The European Community and the Soviet Union sign an agreement on trade and commercial and economic cooperation.

2005

The civil war in Chad begins when rebel groups, allegedly backed by neighbouring Sudan, launch an attack in Adré.

2006

United Arab Emirates holds its first-ever elections.

2010

Governmental protests start in Tunisia, beginning the Arab Spring.