

ILO-assisted factory safety project

Govt., RMG leaders should go the extra mile

AN ILO-assisted factory safety campaign in the readymade garment industry has been launched to improve working condition through reducing threat of fire and building collapse. Assessment for building and fire safety for this project will be conducted by experts from Buet.

The project will have components like building and fire safety assessment, labour inspection system, support for fire and building inspection, occupational safety and health awareness.

Reassuringly, this yet another foreign-backed project only points to our international development partners' concern about the well-being of our workers as well as their willingness to see that this sector may fast bridge the credibility-gap it is at the moment suffering from.

Coming in the wake of Rana Plaza collapse and other such disasters like Tazreen Fashions fire that claimed hundreds of workers' lives, Bangladesh should try to make the most of these well-intentioned efforts by our development partners.

While acknowledging and appreciating these external concerns and financial as well as technical support, we would at the same time like to be assured by matching efforts taken at home by the government and leaders in the RMG sector. But conditions in the sector do not seem to have improved much seeing that disgruntled workers continue to launch violent movements in the street.

We hope the owners of garment factories and the government will go the extra mile to help the international efforts so that the entire RMG sector may ensure complete safety in the life of workers and their workplaces sooner than later.

Drone strikes amount to 'war crimes'

Hundreds of civilians killed

UNITED Nations report released recently coincides with findings of rights groups Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International, which claim that US drone strikes have caused hundreds of civilian deaths in Pakistan and Yemen. Among those killed in Yemen were three children and a pregnant woman, while an elderly woman tending to her garden and a group of labourers gathered for dinner were among the innocent killed in Pakistan.

Known to the military as Unmanned Aerial Vehicles or Remotely Piloted Aerial Systems, drones provide troops with an 'eye in the sky', where piloted flight is considered too dangerous or difficult. While the US is most often silent on its role in drone operations and its legal justifications for its targets, it claims that such attacks command 'the highest level of attention and care'. The abovementioned reports, however, demonstrate otherwise. In fact, as the strikes may have broken international laws formulated to protect civilians, they may very well fall into the category of war crimes, Amnesty International has pointed out.

We strongly condemn these attacks, which are 'clear violations of international humanitarian law' and call for their prompt and thorough investigation and delivery of justice. No nation, just as no individual, no matter how powerful, is above the law; in fact, with greater power comes greater responsibility and accountability. Such crimes against humanity must end immediately and those respon-

FOUNDER OF DAWN AND HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH

DAWN

Even more lethal: Taliban's new bombs

EDITORIAL

THE devastation and human suffering that it leaves in its wake necessarily eclipses something as technical and seemingly uninteresting as the construction of bombs used by militants. But as a report in this newspaper yesterday has indicated, the technology of Taliban bombs is evolving and militants are finding new ways to ensure injured survivors of attacks suffer an array of complications - this by introducing potent new chemicals and substances in the explosives mixture. Potassium, nitrogen, phosphorous, magnesium and other toxins are all being tried out to make human survivors suffer long-term damage and maximum pain. Leave aside the monstrosity of these innovations -- to a bomb maker, the very purpose of the exercise is to maximise suffering -- and consider something else: what is the state doing to try and monitor the production and sale of many of these substances? The obvious answer: not much.

Of course, officials will bemoan a broken regulatory system, limited oversight capacity of the state and a marketplace in which virtually any banned or controlled substance can be easily acquired at the right price. But simply because something is incredibly difficult to start doing, it does not mean no effort should be made. Consider how Americans operating in Afghanistan diligently worked to trace the ammonium nitrate used in many IEDs in that country to fertiliser factories in Pakistan -- a claim that Pakistan has contested, but that does not detract from the effort to try and trace the origins of materials in suicide vests. As noted by officials, many of the chemicals used in bombs are harvested from commonly available fertilisers. Has there been any attempt to track sales at the wholesale level and monitor retail markets? Have fertiliser-producing companies and fertiliser-selling stores been contacted and asked to report suspicious activities or customers? Perhaps there isn't even a need to ask those questions; the answer is almost surely no. Therein lies yet another tragedy in the ongoing fight against militancy: while the militants are evolving, the state is often static and clueless.

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STRATEGICALLY SPEAKING

Brig Gen SHAHEDUL ANAM KHAN
ndc, psc (Retd)

parties, articulated at a time when people were bracing for the worst, these have come as great relief. The optimists see the recent development as something that provides an opportunity to the two parties to engage in a dialogue, the initial makings of which we have already witnessed.

The PM's offer reasserts the party's stand regarding adherence to the constitutional provisions, particularly the 15th Amendment. But the idea of an all party government has been rejected by the BNP as being unclear and one that does not provide a level playing field for all contestants. It feels that the PM's formula is designed to fit her plans to manipulate the next parliamentary elections.

BNP's offer on the other hand only reaffirms the fact that it is still rooted to the idea of a non-party caretaker government as an interim arrangement to oversee the conduct of the next parliamentary elections.

The two parties are therefore as far apart as they have been since the beginning of the imbroglio. Given that reality, one wonders whether there is scope for a resolution of the stand-off that has the potential of dangerous outcome should a solution not be found quickly. However, I am inclined to feel, notwithstanding the out-of-hand dismissal of the proposals by the respective parties, that the compulsions on the two parties to resolve the issue are enormous, the most important of which is the consequences of the failure to come to a mutually acceptable arrangement. Are there any other options open to the two parties?

For the AL it can go head with the election regardless of whether the BNP participates. This option, apart

What now?

At least the AL and BNP proposals have helped to reduce the prospect of a violent situation, for the time being at least, all revolving round the character of the interim political arrangement. How much this will help to address the current political flux and attendant uncertainty is another matter given that neither proposal has found acceptance of the opposite camp.

Although the two proposals do not contain anything new, and are restatements of the long held positions of the two parties, articulated at a time when people were bracing for the worst, these have come as great relief. The optimists see the recent development as something that provides an opportunity to the two parties to engage in a dialogue, the initial makings of which we have already witnessed.

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The two proposals should not be seen as merely proposals, but as opportunity to engage in dialogue to avert chaos, and do so without appearing to be giving grounds to the opposition, or losing face, something that our politicians are so sensitive about.

The outcome of these options is only too obvious -- a national disorder followed by violence and uncertainty. It cannot be lost on the two parties that whatever merit they may think their respective positions have, and the Constitution or not, they will have to share the responsibility for bringing the country to such a pass. Can the country afford further chaos, and can the parties afford to be party to the situation that would ensue should no amicable solution be forthcoming soon?

The two proposals should not be seen as merely proposals, but as opportunity to engage in dialogue to avert chaos, and do so without appearing to be giving grounds to the opposition, or losing face, something that our politicians are so sensitive about.

People's patience is running out and despondency may reach a high pitch with unpredictable consequences, particularly when they are made captives of the caprices of the two parties.

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The writer is Editor, Oped and Defence & Strategic Affairs, *The Daily Star*.

| The New York Times EXCLUSIVE

Mapping a Palestinian strategy

ALI JARBAWI

LAST month, hotel conference rooms here and in Gaza were filled with events commemorating the 20th anniversary of the signing of the Oslo Accords, which were meant to pave the way for lasting peace between Palestinians and Israelis.

The rhetoric at these events was bitter and stinging. Many in attendance called for the accords to be annulled. Even among those who helped cut the deal with Israel in the 1990s, the prevailing sentiment was that Oslo had failed to protect even minimal Palestinian national rights. Rather, they argued, it had enabled Israel to deepen the occupation, mutilating and gaining control over most of the land of Palestine. Instead of bringing an end to the occupation, and liberation for Palestinians, the accords allowed Israel to prevent the creation of a Palestinian state based on the pre-1967 borders.

Although this negative assessment of Oslo is correct, all of the angry rhetoric strangely did not extend to the Palestinian Authority, which was born from the accords and is the current embodiment of them.

If those calling for the cancellation of Oslo were serious and not just engaging in political sloganeering, then they should, logically, also be asking for the dismantlement of the Palestinian Authority. But because growing numbers of Palestinians are becoming financially dependent on the Authority for salaries and for services, and because so many people are benefiting from its existence, the Authority is now considered by many to be a "national achievement" that should be preserved.

Attacking Oslo has become a pressure valve that allows Palestinians to release frustrations while avoiding the real problem: the Palestinian Authority itself and its flawed negotiating strategy.

The Authority, which is led by President Mahmoud Abbas, continues to indulge the fantasy that negotiations might truly end the decades-long conflict. They won't. For the past 20 years, Palestinians approached negotiations as the only path to achieving a final-status political settlement that would satisfy their minimal demand: a sovereign and independent Palestine within pre-1967 borders. From one round of talks to another, they kept labouring to achieve this goal, but suffered one failure after another.

Most Palestinians, apart from Abbas and a few of his aides, are opposed to the current talks. The overwhelming sentiment is that negotiating with Israel is of no value at all, and will not produce any benefit. They have reached that conclusion after the bitter experience of watching two decades of negotiations and seeing Israel dig itself deeper into occupied land, cramming Palestinians into ever shrinking enclaves in which they have no real power.

They believe that Israel is not at all serious about negotiations, since it doesn't want to end the occupation or acknowledge Palestinian rights. Rather, Israel is using negotiations for tactical reasons and as a cover to appease the international community while deepening its settlement policy in occupied East Jerusalem and the West Bank and tightening its grip on, and presence in, Palestinian land.

But this anger toward the negotiations is misplaced.

The focus of the negotiations should be on how to exploit any future talks to incrementally advance Palestinian objectives on the ground, like transferring control over more land and natural resources to Palestinian Authority, easing the restrictions on movement imposed by Israel, and opening borders for Palestinian exports.

social services and creating jobs in order to lower the high unemployment rate. Having a job, good schools, and a functioning health care system is what makes families stay and not emigrate.

Without high hopes and without internal wrangling, Palestinians should continue negotiating in order to satisfy the international community and gain further support abroad for their cause.

The focus of the negotiations should be on how to exploit any future talks to incrementally advance Palestinian objectives on the ground, like transferring control over more land and natural resources to Palestinian Authority, easing the restrictions on movement imposed by Israel, and opening borders for Palestinian exports. Small gains on issues like these should be pursued so long as Palestinian leaders avoid signing any final-status agreement that would require them to renounce Palestinian national rights at this stage -- since such a deal would be patently unjust.

Anything else that can be achieved without jeopardising basic Palestinian rights should be seen as a building block on the road to advancing Palestinians' prolonged struggle for statehood and international legitimacy.

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The writer, a former minister in the Palestinian Authority government, is a Professor of Political Science at Birzeit University.

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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PM's all-party government

The PM has suggested an all-party government system. I believe this is a very good idea as delegates from all political parties can monitor the election process. In a way, all parties will be in power and will have a say in everything. I urge all political parties to examine the feasibility of such a system and weigh all pros and cons and give this a serious thought before going on a rampage.

Aminur Rahim
New DOHS, Mohakhali
Dhaka

Bragging of success

Many of this AL government ministers did not think of becoming a minister in their wildest dream. They did not earn the post rather they were picked, and that too due to their loyalty to their party president. The choice of ministers should have been made through discussion within the decision-making forum of the party. So far as we know, it did not happen. Had it been the case we would have much more competent ministers than what we have now. This government needed badly a team of enlightened, visionary and outspoken advisors who could call a spade a spade unlike the ones they have now. Considering the activities of the present government, it appears, it is not interested to come back to power a second time. They should not have bragged so much about their successes.

Dr. Kamrul Hassan
Professor
Department of Physics
Dhaka University

Illegal Hilsa catching continues

An SMS was frequently being sent by the government instructing people to refrain from catching Hilsa during the fish's peak breeding time between October 13 and 23. It was indeed a good initiative from the authorities to create mass awareness. The gradual decline of this fish over the recent years is unsettling. But still we are reading in the newspapers that catching of Hilsa is continuing illegally by many fishermen (sometimes with the help of some corrupt government officials in exchange for bribe). We want stern government action to stop this illegal practice.

Ahmed Shamim Ansary
Daffodil International University

Comments on news report, "Who to head it is only obstacle," published on October 21, 2013

Nasirullah Mridha, USA

Hasina is following her predecessor Khaleda's step to conduct a controversial election. Hasina will not bow down to opposition's demand and Khaleda will not let Hasina to follow her path. The consequence will be pandemonium.

Abul Kashem

Imposing indefinite restrictions on meetings in Dhaka Metropolitan Area (which will cover the whole country in the long run) proves how anxious the ruling leaders are to re-grab power. It appears beyond any confusion that AL leaders are well aware about their fate in the next election under a neutral government and its consequences.

Spiderman

An eminent Nobel laureate is here but Hasina will not agree. Similarly there could be someone else but Khaleda may not agree. So what next? We can't get angels from the sky. Nowhere in the world is there so much mistrust and lack of respect.

Shovon

If BNP won in 2008 election and Khaleda Zia were made the head of the poll-time government, would Awami League participate in the election?

S. M. Iftekhar Ahmed

All the time the politicians claim that they are pro-people, but unfortunately in reality they value their ego more than anything else, especially the two so-called leading ladies. For the sake of the nation, the PM should put aside her pride and not be part of any interim government. I also feel that having seen their bickering for years, people should come to their senses and at least not vote for either of these two ladies in the future.

"Pran nonchalant, govt silent" (October 21, 2013)

Ahmed Zakaria

If this were any other country, the manufacturer would probably go out of business. It's not happening in Bangladesh though. They will just publish an ad in the newspapers vehemently denying everything and standing by their product.

SM

You have no right to do business with this mindset.

Spiderman

In Rana Plaza, thousand plus were killed; garment fires also killed many thousands and nothing serious happened. So what's the problem if ten times more than average lead is found in Pran's products? With corrupt officials in food control department and links with high profile politicians, nothing will happen to Pran authorities. Some may die or get ill but so what?