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UN statement on Rohingyas

Myanmar must be made to comply

THE UN Security Council has once again dropped plans, in the face of likely Chinese veto, to adopt a resolution demanding an end to the violence against the Rohingyas. What we have instead is a formal statement calling upon Myanmar to ensure no further excessive use of military force in Rakhine State, to restore civilian administration and apply the rule of law, and to take immediate steps in accordance with their obligations and commitments to respect human rights. This relieves the mounting pressure on the Myanmar government. But where does this leave the Rohingyas? According to the UN, more than 600,000 Rohingyas have been driven out of their homes, and who must be taken back, as the world body has also stated. And conducive conditions must be created for them to go back.

It is ironic that the Myanmar government continues to insist that military operations have ceased against the Rohingyas. If that were the case, why are thousands of Rohingyas still streaming over the border to our side every day? If it is fear that is compelling these people to flee Myanmar, then those fears must be addressed.

It is also imperative that the Myanmar government not only expresses public support but also implements the Kofi Annan committee's recommendations that should be the blueprint for resolving the Rohingya crisis. So, all this foot-dragging by Myanmar now is completely out of place and must stop. And this is what the UN should be demanding. The mere issuance of a statement will not be enough unfortunately. UN must ensure that its call is complied with.

Clash amongst DU teachers

Most unbecoming of their calling

THE recent incident of assault that took place at a meeting of a group of teachers at Dhaka University does not befit their profession. As this daily has reported, two factions of pro-Awami League teachers of Dhaka University were involved in a row at a meeting of the Blue Panel teachers at TSC on November 2. At one point, one of the feuding teachers allegedly fell upon another and left him with minor injuries. Regrettably, the predictable mutual blaming does very little to salvage the sullied image of the teachers' community.

While Dhaka University has created some of the brightest people of this country and teachers of this institution have always led the nation in all its glorious democratic movements in the past, the present degradation of its political culture is shocking. Some teachers, unfortunately, have become actively involved in party politics for petty interests: promotions, positions in various university organisations, financial benefits, etc. The latest incident is the worst example of teachers' involvement in party politics.

By assaulting each other, what example have these teachers set for the students? When some teachers of the best public university of the country engage in political feuds, the overall educational environment of the university is hampered. We would like to believe that what we have witnessed in the last several days is not the actual representation of the larger teachers' fraternity of DU. It's our hope that political differences would not manifest in violence in our highest seat of learning and vitiate its atmosphere.

KNOT SO TRUE



RUBANA HUQ

SHIRIN has been with us for 12 years, Mahmuda for nine, Rakib for six. The number of workers who have worked for us in one particular factory for over 10 years is massive. Most live in Khilkhet, where we have one of our factories. We are currently scheduled to shift to a new one in Banglabazar in Gazipur. This factory of ours has been in existence for the last 14 years. Small in scale, it was always easy to manage. But time has come to move it out of the existing space as in this factory, we will no more be able to manage and address our compliance issues.

While I was away, workers who have never made any noise suddenly started creating havoc, as soon as relocation notice was served to them. I had to call from London and was on speaker phone with them for an hour and was finally able to convince them to resume work. This week was another experience.

All we need is a transparent system with suggestions from all sides on how to become a body free of influence and favour. An ombudsman could help solve the crisis along with the induction of a chief technical officer, who could ensure proper functioning of the whole remediation process.

When I saw them after three whole months, there were no arguments; they just wanted to hear from me. When the plans were announced, not even one raised their voice and just accepted the inevitable: This factory was to close down soon and the production facility was to shift to the new location. Couple of resignations followed, but most decided to just go with it. It is my good fortune that our workers are who they are and I couldn't have asked for more.

Like ours, hundreds of factories are to relocate and hundreds would have to close down. The option of doing business in small facilities is over. Post-Rana Plaza, Accord and Alliance have

Are we ready?



Will Bangladesh's RMG industry be ready to take responsibility to ensure factory safety and protection of workers' rights in case of the exit of Accord and Alliance?

PHOTO: STAR

made sure that there would be no business in Bangladesh unless security is ensured. The building will have to be structurally sound, the fire equipment in place (including fire detection and protection system) and electrical integrity foolproof. Bangladesh has benefited from these rules. Most of us have complied and have been able to crawl to the next level in spite of acute financial difficulty, especially when margins have dipped further, questions on productivity have popped up and costs have been threatening.

All's good as long as we can sustain the progress. Question is, can we or can we not? Question is, will we be proactive, going forward? Answers are simple: We can't not sustain what we have achieved so far and going forward, prescriptions have to cease and we have to actively engage with what we have and make self-auditing mandatory.

2016-17 have been years filled with anticipation and activity. The sector had to sustain the blows of a looming GSP challenge, which included intense labour issues. On top of that, the industry had to convey to the world that we were serious about making it on our own. Thus, the formation of Remediation Coordination Council (RCC) was prompted by ILO, which is to overview and ensure progress of factory safety in conjunction with the local stakeholders. RMG Tripartite Consultative Committee (TCC) was also formed so that workers' woes could be taken care of. A revised draft of the labour law has been submitted and EPZ draft law was recalled from parliament—this behind-the-scenes

list can go on.

After all that has happened, the readymade garment sector now happily faces the inevitable challenge of being weaned off the support that it has had. I add "happily" as no nation should ever be subjected to perennial surveillance. Point is, are we ready? Is there a mechanism set in place, which will help us to carry on the work that has been done? Or rather, will we be ready in the next six months when Accord and Alliance will complete their tenure and should be ready for an exit, without seeking any extension?

Out of Accord and Alliance, the latter has opted to leave and is looking for an exit plan, which will ensure a smooth transition benefitting the sector. Accord, on the other hand, hopes to leave only in case "adequate" progress has been made and enough has been done to ensure successful continuation of their good work, which has helped the industry enormously. What is the structure that will make sure that the interests of all the stakeholders will stay intact? How will we convince the brands and the unions that their interests in securing the safe production of their products will continue?

Simple. An effective transition practice has to take place with immediate effect so that January 2018 onward, an independent body begins functioning, in its own capacity, which would include all stakeholders including the ministry of commerce, ministry of labour and employment, brands, trade unions, manufacturers and the ILO. This

independent body could overview the already existing RCC. All we need is a transparent system with suggestions from all sides on how to become a body free of influence and favour. An ombudsman could help solve the crisis along with the induction of a chief technical officer, who could ensure proper functioning of the whole remediation process. Alongside all this, both Accord and Alliance could also ensure their legacy by influencing the local stakeholders to continue what they had begun: health and safety committees, helplines, training et al.

It is in the best interest of all that we continue taking our own responsibility. A thriving sector supporting millions cannot be subjected to permanent monitoring. Neither can the business be threatened with suffering the consequences forever nor can the industry survive on mealy, bare minimum promises. All sides need to step up and make sure that blame games don't mar the scenario and that unnecessary, undesired stakeholders' confrontation does not endanger the lives of the millions whose livelihood depends on a single industry that could crumble to the ground, only because we weren't quick enough to notice and make amends. Stalling to form an immediate consensus and a specific format of the next body should not be allowed. Slacking must cease. Progress should be visible and progress must be acknowledged.

Rubana Huq is the managing director of Mohammadi Group.

What to look forward to in COP23

POLITICS OF CLIMATE CHANGE



SALEEMUL HUQ

I have just arrived in Bonn, Germany to attend the 23rd Conference of Parties (COP23) under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) being held here for the next two weeks. The annual COP takes place in November or December each year and is hosted by a country in a different continent each time.

This year it is the turn of Asia Pacific and the official host is Fiji. However, since Fiji could not accommodate around 20,000 participants from all over the world, the Government of Germany has kindly offered to physically host the meeting in Bonn while Fiji is the official host. The prime minister of Fiji is the

COP president.

Not every COP is equally important in terms of decision-making and COP23 is a relatively low-key COP where the focus will be on developing the details of implementation of the Paris Agreement (PA) which was achieved at COP21 in Paris, France in December 2015 at a very high-level COP with over a hundred heads of state in attendance.

The PA has set the long-term global temperature goal of staying well below 2 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels and to limit temperature increase to 1.5 degrees Celsius if possible, as well as agreeing to develop a global goal on adaptation and to treat 'loss and damage' as a separate issue from 'adaptation'.

COP23 will discuss how to implement the agreement by developing the PA rule book, and arranging a facilitated dialogue in 2018 and a global stock-taking in 2023. Here are some of the issues to look out for at COP23.

The question on everyone's mind is,

what will the US do? While the US government has formally given notice of its intention to withdraw from the PA they are still in the UNFCCC and their withdrawal from the PA will take two years to come into force. Hence the US will indeed be sending a delegation which will be able to participate fully, although it remains to be seen how they behave in the negotiations.

The second major issue that has already been highlighted by the prime minister of Fiji is the issue of 'loss and damage' from climatic events around the world which can be attributed to human-induced climate change. The series of devastating natural disasters in 2017, including the severe floods in Bangladesh and South Asia, represents a tipping point in terms of the impact of human-induced climate change.

This is perhaps best illustrated by the Category 4 and Category 5 hurricanes that hit Texas (Hurricane

Harvey), Florida (Hurricane Irma) and Puerto Rico (Hurricane Maria) this year. The fact that there were hurricanes was quite normal but what was abnormal was the elevated sea surface temperature in the Atlantic and Caribbean which caused each hurricane to be much more intense and devastating than it otherwise would have been. The total loss and damage in Texas, Florida and Puerto Rico is estimated to be over USD 300 billion which the US Congress will now have to consider for their reconstruction. The US, like many other countries, has a system of compensating states for loss and damage but there is no such agreement at the global level.

In COP19 held in Poland in 2013, we did agree to set up the Warsaw International Mechanism (WIM) for Loss and Damage and under it an executive committee was formed which developed a five-year work plan that will be discussed in Bonn. However, the work plan does not address the issue of raising funds for compensation for loss and damage.

So, in Bonn, under the leadership of Fiji and the Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS) and support from the least developed countries (LDCs) group and the Africa group, the issue of innovative financing for compensation for loss and damage will be a contentious issue (as it is likely to be opposed by the developed countries).

Finally, it is important to realise that even though the main task of the COP is for government delegations to negotiate and make important decisions, there are various non-governmental observers from civil society and business community, including the youth, indigenous people, etc., who hold hundreds of side events all over the city. And often these events are far more interesting than the boring "official" negotiations! Over the next two weeks, I hope to issue commentaries on the COP23 negotiations, as well as on the side events in Bonn.

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Demonstration to end the use of coal on November 4, 2017 in Bonn, Germany before the beginning of COP23.

PHOTO: AFP

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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Look out for Bangladeshis in Paradise Papers

ICIJ, a global network of more than 200 journalists in 70 countries, has just leaked a trove of tax-haven financial records dubbed as the Paradise Papers—laying bare some of the financial secrets of the global elite. ICIJ had also leaked the Panama Papers before this.

The revelation exposes the assets and shadowy dealings of many prominent politicians, businessmen and organisations across the world. In addition, it unveils the ways in which some global corporate giants avoid taxes legally. It is expected, especially in the West, that there would be varying degrees of consequences for those whose name appeared in the Paradise Papers.

Its predecessor, the Panama Papers, allegedly revealed the names of some Bangladeshi businessmen and politicians. However, in Bangladesh, unlike some other countries, there seems to be no progress in the investigation relating to the individuals whose names reportedly appeared in the Panama Papers.

It is likely that names of Bangladeshis will appear in the Paradise Papers, too. The media and the government should look out for Bangladeshi nationals in the Paradise Papers. If names of Bangladeshi nationals are found in the papers, then the government should ensure that these individuals—who may have avoided taxes by stashing money offshore—are thoroughly investigated.

Karim Hasan, Rajshahi