

Anti-drug war

Rule of law indispensable

THE rationale that Chittagong Metropolitan Police Commissioner has recently given to justify the ongoing anti-drug operations, which have killed hundreds of alleged drug traders and peddlers, does not wash. In his justification of the campaign, he said the loss of lives was a "necessary" sacrifice for the sake of peace. Such a notion runs contrary to the spirit of law and order that he has a solemn duty to uphold.

The idea that killing alleged drug traders would shrink the trade is impractical and dangerous. Such summary actions may provide a temporary palliative for the disease but they cannot be a permanent cure. Moreover, there are serious risks when the law enforcing agencies are given near carte blanche.

Robust response to drug trade may reduce the availability and increase the price of drugs for some time but not permanently. Targeting mid-level operatives or peddlers with the big fish out of the drug net would do little to disrupt the supply chain, which must be the primary focus of the anti-narcotics drive. And, most importantly, the law enforcement agencies must not break the law in trying to maintain law and order.

The senior police officer, however, raised a good point. He said that the border security forces have largely failed to restrain the huge influx of drugs into the country. The border forces must do everything necessary to enhance their capability in preventing inflow of drugs.

Instead of resorting to extrajudicial methods, the authorities concerned should root out the causative factors that help the drug trade thrive in a society and conduct persistent awareness campaigns against drugs.

Banning Lagunas abruptly

Provide alternative mode

THIS paper has covered the lack of safety of human hauler vehicles like the Laguna for many years. We have urged the government to take steps against such vehicles that have no papers and are driven by drivers who lack licenses and in many cases are underage. But the abrupt banning of these vehicles has come as a surprise; commuters have been left in the lurch not knowing how they will get around the city. While we wholeheartedly welcome the police drive against unfit vehicles, the knee-jerk reaction by authorities to ban human haulers without finding an alternative is not quite the way to address road safety. The ban on Lagunas could have been done in phases so that alternative means of transport could be introduced to ease commuters' plight.

The reaction of commuters has been one of frustration, and rightly so! And it is not just commuters who have been left to fend for themselves. Hundreds, if not thousands, of these Lagunas ply city roads and their drivers and helpers have mouths to feed. Precisely what they are going to do now is a question. While it is understandable that law enforcers are having a very difficult time ensuring that rules are obeyed in a country where road laws have been openly flouted for decades, this sort of shock therapy is only going to create more chaos.

There are two aspects of the matter. One is that the Laguna meets the needs of commuters on certain routes and the other being the need for road safety. And it is for the authorities to reconcile the two equally important factors equitably.

Honing policy on Rohingya issue

 PLEASURE IS
ALL MINE

 SHAH HUISAIN
IMAM

IN the past we have been painfully aware of the interminable waves of persecution of Rohingya Muslims from the Rakhine state in Myanmar and the consequent foisting of an increasing refugee burden on Bangladesh. But now, nobody is left in any doubt about the intractability of the problem: "Promised" repatriation of Rohingyas sheltered in Bangladesh to their homes in the Rakhine state is being reneged on. Denied of citizenship rights, returnees would be consigned to a life in camp and restrictive movement with the levers retained to revert to ethnic cleansing at will.

The point is you cannot give the reluctant host even a benefit of doubt, especially on the back of the confluence of stepped up diplomatic pressures on Myanmar from within and outside of the UN system to behave responsibly. Of course, these lacked endorsement of China and Russia to make it binding on the generals and their cohort to answer for genocidal charges outlined in a

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damning United Nations Security Council report! It also recommended invoking jurisdiction of the International Criminal Court or a Rwanda-type special tribunal to bring the recalcitrant to justice.

Unabashedly, Myanmar authorities go about their "public relations" activities (read disinformation campaign!), one specimen of which goes like this. In a book published by the military junta, picture of two corpses floating in the Buriganga in 1971 was used blaming the



PHOTO: STAR

Rohingyas for the cruel act. In a chapter on ethnic mayhem a picture was captioned: "After the British colonial occupation of the coastal region, Rohingyas infiltrated into the area." Actually the photo was shot in Tanzania in 1996 when Hutu refugees were entering the country fleeing genocide in Rwanda.

In contrast to such deceitful hate campaign of the Burmese military, we appear to be pussyfooting in our reaction. We are perhaps erring on the side of caution in dealing with Myanmar which by any definition is a tough customer to countenance especially in sensitive humanitarian concern of their own creation. It is interesting to note though, "Both Myanmar and Bangladesh have shown diplomatic maturity by not raising the Rohingya issue in the (Bimstec) summit when the organisation is not ready to deal with this kind of issue," so stated the secretary general M Shahidul Islam. Since the Bimstec is a grouping comprising Bangladesh, India, Myanmar, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Bhutan and Nepal, even a discussion in the retreat among some friendly nations could have added a dimension to strictly bilateral confines on the issue at hand.

Crucially, how can we clinch a breakthrough in ensuring that Myanmar submit to world opinion on Rohingya issue? Precisely, why don't China, Russia, the US and India make a common cause

of leveraging Myanmar to grant citizenship rights to the Rohingya Muslims solely dictated by humanitarian considerations? The emphasis "solely" is aimed to stir the same human rights compunction that big countries cry their hearts out on in relation to one another.

There is an existential challenge here not for the victims alone but for the perpetrator as well. Myanmar can whip up the bogey of the so-called ragtag Arakan Liberation Army to evoke sympathies of powerful countries drawing on religious extremist threats but their large-scale persecution is breeding "lost generations" of disgruntled Muslim Rohingyas. They may not find an easy prey to recruitment by sleeper cells of ISIS or al-Qaeda expelled from Syria and Afghanistan, and some other adopted homes. So unemployed or idling away Rohingyas may be treated like a ticking time bomb.

Michael Kugelman, Deputy Director, Wilson Centre Washington stated in reply to a written question to *Prothom Alo*, "For a long time, in fact, in last few centuries, human rights, and other moral issues have been ignored on the plea of so-called national interest. We are seeing the replay of the same theatrics in regard to the Rohingya question."

Both Beijing and Moscow regard investments in oil and infrastructures as too important to risk annoying Myanmar government. It is for this reason that they are not inclined to support any meaningful step in favour of the

Rohingya."

This is only the first year of refugee care and only 35 percent of the budget requirement has been available so far. Already, experts discern a bit of donor fatigue. The refugees may be billeted for the long haul—it may be difficult to limit the rehabilitation costs going forward.

Perhaps in time we have to go for refugee sharing. Turkey and Jordan have accepted Syrian refugees, and they are bank-rolled for the task.

All this pain of taking disturbing options can be obviated if China and Russia break out of their defence and pampering of Myanmar realising an international stake in the matter.

The plan for construction of B-Terminal for Chattogram port has evinced enthusiastic interest of five countries—China, India, Singapore, Korea and UAE. We are linked with China in USD 60 billion worth of infrastructure projects. Bangladesh is part of the Chinese One Belt, One Road Initiative and its global banking institution. Our special relationship with Russia dating back to the liberation war days is prospering. That said, may we enter a plea with the veto empowered countries to use their good offices with Myanmar to take back their nationals with full dignity accorded to them?

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Turkey drifting in the Bosphorus!

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TURKEY'S dream of joining the European Union (EU) has never seriously crossed the Bosphorus. Following an abortive coup in July 2016, President Erdogan's colossal task to force an exit of armed forces from politics is quivering Turkey. The last blow came on an already faltering economy, when President Trump doubled the tariff on all metal imports from Turkey. The Turkish lira immediately lost 20 percent value against the US dollar. With a backbreaking agenda, President Erdogan is increasingly turning authoritarian

concern that Turkey may become a bridgehead for the rush of immigrants and terrorists under liberal EU law.

Turkey now is a redundant fortress of the NATO. Putin's Russia doesn't warrant global mobilisation. President Trump's incoherent policies have come into conflict with Turkey. A plethora of complaints between US and Turkey suggest that the marriage is under strain. Turkey has the second largest armed force in NATO after US. American military hardware is no longer reaching Turkey. She is not immediately threatened but needs strategic moorings to stabilise defence. Many in Turkey feel

the level of Egypt, Saudi Arabia and Jordan.

Turkey has a longstanding quarrel with Kurds. Destabilisation of Iraq has opened up an opportunity for Kurds to enjoy a de facto sovereign status in northern Iraq. Bolstered by gains in fragile Iraq and Syria, Kurds are ever more determined to carve out a homeland comprising parts of Iraq, Syria, Turkey and Iran.

If the Kurdish armed struggle picks up wind, both Turkey and Iran will be forced into bloody internecine warfare. Turkey is already drawn in conflict with Kurds in Syria and within Turkey.

forces, reorientation of century-old pro-west policies, civil war in neighbouring Syria, and a rejuvenated Kurdish independent struggle, Turkey is facing the most trying of times since the demise of the Ottoman Empire. Out of exasperation, the then PM, now President Erdogan, told Russian President Putin in 2013, "Get us out of this suffering. We are willing to finalise a free trade agreement with Eurasian countries." Turkey for now is drifting.

The SCO (Shanghai Cooperation Organization) is fast expanding in tune with emerging China. But the fragmented culture of the SCO members cannot easily cement anything beyond trade and culture. Both Pakistan and India along with China and Russia, central Asian republics with divergent interests, are members of the SCO. Suspicion within the SCO is no alternative to NATO. The embryonic alliance of convenience among Russia, Iran, Turkey, Pakistan, India and China has an unpredictable future. It is challenging for Turkey to retain NATO membership while becoming a member of the SCO.

Even if Turkey becomes disposable, it will be a strategic blunder on the part of the west to throw Turkey out of the NATO. Pakistan and Iran, already unreliable to the west, are cajoling Turkey to revive the old ethos. If Turkey is gone, the entire northeastern frontier of the Middle East will suffer from psychological vacuum.

India in all probability can't meet the security vacuum of the Middle East. With the EU busy with Brexit and the US looking inward, global strategy is focusing more on regional boundaries these days. Is this a preamble to a change of guard for the 21st century?

The security vacuum in the turbulent Middle East needs addressing. Turkey is deliberately moving east in search of a new identity. That fits well in the game plan of Putin's Russia and cautious China. She is getting some sophisticated anti-aircraft missile system from Russia and China to the chagrin of the NATO. Turkey is also taking cautious interest in the Muslim belt. It will not be surprising if Turkey opts for nuclear capability to realign herself in the security vacuum.

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Presidents Hassan Rouhani of Iran, Recep Tayyip Erdogan of Turkey and Vladimir Putin of Russia at a joint news conference in Ankara, Turkey, April 4, 2018.

PHOTO: UMIT BEKTAS/REUTERS

adding the country's distance from the EU and NATO.

With the resurgence of the rightist forces in Europe, Turkey's legitimacy as a European nation is facing stiff resistance. Her cultural diversity is a focal point on the near impossible bargaining table of the EU. If admitted, she will be the largest EU country that will hugely diversify European culture. There is also

the NATO membership may become a "Trojan Horse" someday. The next decade is therefore crucial.

With no worthwhile challenger in sight in the immediate vicinity, Turkey, once a strong ally, is seen as a suspicious mole now. It could be the ideal time for Israel to search and destroy potential enemies. Some would like to see proactive Iran and Turkey be tamed to

President Trump has assured President Erdogan not to supply arms to Syrian Kurds. How much it will hold under fluid policies of President Trump needs careful observation.

President Erdogan is in a titanic struggle trying to tame the role of armed forces in politics tailored by Kemal Ataturk. With serious economic constraints, reorganisation of the armed

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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The world is failing the Rohingyas

After Myanmar, at the time called Burma, gained independence from Britain in 1948, its successive governments had recognised people of all ethnicities living in the country, including the Rohingyas, as full citizens. There were even multiple representatives in the Burmese parliament from the Rohingya community.

However, after the military seized power, the recognition of Rohingyas as Myanmar's citizens was cancelled and their representation in the parliament abolished. Since then, a systematic campaign of oppression has been unleashed by the divisive military rulers against the Rohingya population, which had eventually culminated into the recent exodus of nearly a million Rohingyas from Myanmar to Bangladesh.

The Bangladesh government has since the very beginning of this exodus, triggered by a brutal military operation, given the refugees shelter, infusing new life, energy and strength into them.

The world community should recognise this travesty. It needs to increase its efforts to help our planet's most persecuted group of people so that they no longer have to remain stateless.

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