

Timely HC order about citizens' rights

There is a need for accountability in the country's justice system

WE are delighted to learn of the observations made by the High Court in connection with the case against actor Porir Moni, which most deeply reflect our concerns regarding the current state of the judicial system. According to a report in this daily, the High Court said that the investigating officer (IO) disregarded Supreme Court guidelines and laws in seeking remand for the second and third times in the narcotics case brought against her, and also criticised two lower court judges for granting the remand prayers.

The full text of the HC order was released on Wednesday, which stated, "A police officer has to think about the legal and basic issues before taking an accused on remand", and that the granting of the remand prayers "pricks our judicial consensus [about] how the magistrates concerned were so satisfied [as] to allow prayers for remands a couple of times."

We applaud the HC for this opportune order, which comes at a time when the lower judiciary's activities have raised a lot of questions in the public mind. Recently, the people of this country have been given ample reasons to believe that justice is not being carried out. Arbitrary use of rejection of bail pleas and indiscriminate granting of remand prayers have become playthings in the hands of the judiciary, to be used in any way they like, even if it acts as an obstacle to the smooth functioning of the justice system. From this, it can be presumed that unsavoury elements have penetrated the system, and there are allegations of financial transactions often being part and parcel of such miscarriages of justice.

As such, the HC observations could not have come at a better moment, but we would also like to ask—where do we go from here? The HC has clearly taken a stand on the right of every citizen to receive a fair and transparent trial, and their constitutional right not to be subjected to torture and cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment. This has created an opportunity for accountability, and we request the HC, or even the law ministry, to fully take advantage of this and lead an investigation into the misuse of the law, especially in the lower judiciary. We congratulate the HC on their timely observations, and we hope that this will trigger serious internal investigations that will eventually lead to some much-needed accountability in the justice system.

A goldmine of corruption in Chattogram

Complicity of state officials, politicians should make this case a top priority for prosecutors

IT'S quite alarming to know that a syndicate of former and current bureaucrats and officials of Police Bureau of Investigation (PBI) as well as politicians in Cox's Bazar have systematically siphoned off Tk 78 crore from three development projects, according to the findings of the Anti-Corruption Commission's Chattogram office. The details of the heist are truly shocking. According to the 750-page probe report, 44 government officials, including 23 admin cadre officers, were involved in corruption in the three projects, making a fortune at the expense of taxpayers' money. They include a former deputy commissioner of Cox's Bazar, former additional deputy commissioner, former UNO, four former and current officials of PBI Cox's Bazar unit, including the SP and ex-additional SP, and a host of others—such as seven political leaders, including Cox's Bazar district Awami League president and secretary.

The ACC report illustrates how methodical and pre-planned their activities were and how ruthlessly they carried them out. For example, for two of the projects, the District Land Acquisition Committee (DLAC) led by the deputy commissioner intentionally chose disputed sites, overlooking legal barriers. The DLAC acquired 100 decimals of land for Tk 29.29 crore for one project, and another two acres for Tk 36 crore, when all the necessary land could have been acquired for a little over Tk 17 crore, according to the ACC. In the process, it violated the guidelines under the law for land acquisition and requisition.

When it came to compensating the owners of the land, the syndicate defrauded ordinary people and denied them their rightful reparation. The group forcibly destroyed the houses of poor people and drove them out of their own land, while pocketing Tk 29 crore through payments to 15 fake owners. Posing as landowners, even the Cox's Bazar municipality mayor's family members pocketed Tk 36 crore from one of the projects.

We are truly astonished at the scale of corruption that this group was involved in. They really are in a league of their own when it comes to crime and corruption, which is why they should have no place in any capacity to serve the public—which they, clearly, have no intention of doing anyway. Through its investigation, the ACC has unearthed a goldmine of corruption, and we congratulate it on a job well done. However, the job is not fully completed yet. These people now must be brought to justice, and the process of prosecution should start without any delay. None of them should be able to escape punishment as per the law for what they have done, no matter how powerful they or their allies are. That is what the authorities must now ensure.



ABU AFSARUL HAIDER

POVERTY has many roots, and it has many causes, but among those causes, war and arms sales are one of the greatest obstacles to development and poverty reduction. War and arms trade may have fattened the pockets of some businesses and individuals, but millions have been plunged into poverty. Social scientists and economists argue that once a country experiences conflict, it faces a reversal of economic development, because when a war or armed conflict begins, its consequences extend far beyond human casualties. Wars directly destroy homes, hospitals, businesses, schools, infrastructure and other national resources worth billions of dollars, resulting in low or negative economic growth, increasing unemployment which in turn creates poverty and widens income inequality.

According to the Institute for Economics and Peace (IEP), the estimated economic cost of armed conflict, war and violence to the global economy in 2020 was USD 14.96 trillion—in purchasing power parity (PPP) terms. This figure is equivalent to 11.6 percent of the global GDP.

Today, in nearly 50 conflict zones around the world, some one and a half billion people live under the threat of violence. These countries are spending up to 59 percent of their GDP on the effects of violence. Syria, with its ongoing civil war, suffered the greatest economic impact with almost 60 percent of its GDP lost to conflict in 2019, followed by Afghanistan (50 percent) and South Sudan (46 percent). From Syria to Yemen, Haiti to Mali, South Sudan to Venezuela, Afghanistan to Myanmar—political crises, war and armed conflicts have forced millions to flee their homes.

According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees' (UNHCR) Global Trends Report, by the end of 2020, more than 8.24 crore people fled war or persecution. The report also confirms that just five countries make up more than two-thirds of all refugees: Syria (68 lakh), Venezuela (54 lakh), Afghanistan (28 lakh), South Sudan (22 lakh), and Myanmar (11 lakh). These displaced people are forced to seek safety in neighbouring countries, where they live in makeshift camps in horrible conditions, often struggling to meet basic needs like health, education, food, housing, water and sanitation, to name a few.

Today, about 9.2 percent of world population—about 68.9 crore people—live in extreme poverty on less than USD 1.90 a day, according to the World Bank. Among the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), ending extreme poverty by 2030 are part of a comprehensive global agenda, but these intensifying wars, armed conflicts and violence are suggesting that the global target of ending extreme poverty

by 2030 will be missed by a large margin. New research estimates that the number of people living in extreme poverty is expected to rise to about 75 crore by the end of 2021. Meanwhile, projections by the World Bank, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), and others estimate that by 2030, 50-64 percent of the global poor will live in countries affected by fragility, conflicts, and high levels of violence. Today, only a handful of economically and politically powerful global elites are setting the rules of the world. For the past several years, these powerful nations have been preaching "world peace," but the question remains: Do they really practise what they preach?

Take the United States for example, the world's leading economic power. Since its birth on July 4, 1776, the country has

combined arms sales of the top 25. These companies have benefited tremendously from the growth in global military spending. SIPRI noted that world military expenditures in 2020 totalled USD 1.981 trillion.

The five biggest spenders in 2020, which together accounted for 62 percent of global military expenditure, were the United States, China, India, Russia, and the United Kingdom, according to SIPRI. With a military budget of an estimated USD 778 billion, the US remained the world's largest spender in 2020, accounting for 39 percent of global military spending, followed by China (USD 252 billion, 13 percent), India (USD 72.9 billion, 3.7 percent), Russia (USD 61.7 billion, 3.1 percent) and the United Kingdom (USD 59.2 billion, 3 percent). In 2019, the combined military expenditure of the 27 EU member states

conflict, war, double standards, and hypocrisy. It is really unfortunate that while trillions of dollars are devoted to killing people, there is much less money spent to keep people alive. The United States spent USD 2.26 trillion on its war in Afghanistan. Spending that kind of money in any country should have lifted most people out of poverty, but sadly, in 2020, 47.3 percent of the Afghan population still lived below the national poverty line.

Let's recall that world leaders once committed to "end poverty in all its forms everywhere" by 2030, and we're just nine years away from that deadline. Interestingly, the SIPRI report said that military expenditure amounted to 2.3 percent of global gross domestic product—and 10 percent of that money would be enough to fund the global goals agreed upon by the United Nations to end poverty



Displacement and poverty are the inevitable results of wars and internal conflicts, and the Rohingyas are a prime example of that.

FILE PHOTO: REUTERS

been at war for 93 percent of its existence. While they try to be noble by claiming that they have entered wars because they are "fighting for justice," "for democracy," or "fighting against terrorism and dictatorship," the entire world knows what the real motive underlying these wars and conflicts is, and who the beneficiaries of these wars are.

According to new data released by the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), arms sales by the world's 25 largest arms-producing and military services companies (arms companies) totalled USD 361 billion in 2019. That year, the top five arms companies were all based in the United States: Lockheed Martin, Boeing, Northrop Grumman, Raytheon, and General Dynamics. These five companies together registered USD 166 billion in annual arms sales. In total, 12 US companies appear in the top 25 for 2019, accounting for 61 percent of the

was 186 billion euros.

In the wake of the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001, the United States launched an international war on terrorism. A report from the "Costs of War" project at Brown University revealed that 20 years of post-9/11 wars have cost the US an estimated USD 8 trillion, and over 929,000 people—including US military members, allied fighters, opposition fighters, civilians, journalists and humanitarian aid workers—have died as a direct result of war. The report also confirms that the US post-9/11 wars have forcibly displaced at least 38 million people in and from Afghanistan, Iraq, Pakistan, Yemen, Somalia, the Philippines, Libya, and Syria. This number exceeds the total displaced population by every war since 1900, except World War II.

Given the world's present circumstances, it does not seem to be a very nice place right now; there is too much hatred,

and hunger by 2030.

Therefore, if the world's so-called "saviours" really want to achieve the goal of eradicating extreme poverty from the world and establish peace and prosperity, then they must stop war and oppression now, and change their mindset, attitude and policies in ways that may reduce international tensions. They need to understand that war will never bring peace and prosperity to the world; it just adds up to the hatred and enmity among the nations and hinder efforts to combat poverty. Extreme poverty in our world could quickly become a thing of the past if only some of their monstrous military budgets could be diverted towards humanitarian goals, investing in infrastructure like building schools, hospitals and skills development institutions in countries that are struggling.

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Joe Biden's Afghan nightmare



ELIZABETH DREW

IT is far from clear why President Joe Biden deserves the obloquy heaped on him for the US evacuation from Afghanistan. This is especially true given the endings of other American wars, and the

nearly impossible situation confronting him—in particular, that the Kabul airport is located within a city of millions which had just come under Taliban control.

The repetitive airing of clips showing panicked Afghans clinging to C-17 cargo planes after this was no longer happening made for far more dramatic scenes than the smooth take-offs that followed during the next 17 days of evacuation, yet news programmes kept rerunning those chaotic images, creating an impression of Biden as hapless. Yet, some 120,000 people—including troops of US allies as well as Afghans who had helped the US cause—were evacuated by air from Kabul, which was a logistical triumph.

Since Biden chose to end the evacuation by August 31, the date he had set, a few hundred Americans—some not ready to depart, many unable to reach Kabul airport—as well as hundreds of Afghans who had worked with the United States, were left behind. (A few have been evacuated since.) But Biden faced only bad choices. Had he prolonged America's presence, US troops and those of allies would have been put at more risk, especially from the murderous Islamic State offshoot that had begun a campaign of suicide bombings.

The retreat from Afghanistan has revealed much about the nature of the government that Biden is running and how he runs it. Although Donald Trump—who also wanted to get out of Afghanistan—left Biden with an unworkable settlement with the Taliban, Biden's decisions on withdrawal were

mostly buttressed by his long-held belief that, when al-Qaeda was driven out of Afghanistan and Osama bin Laden was killed, America's strategic needs had been met. Despite his deep convictions about the correctness of his decisions, Biden brought trouble on himself by offering cheery predictions—such as that the Afghan government wouldn't fall any time soon. When that proved unrealistic, Biden became defensive, even belligerent, which

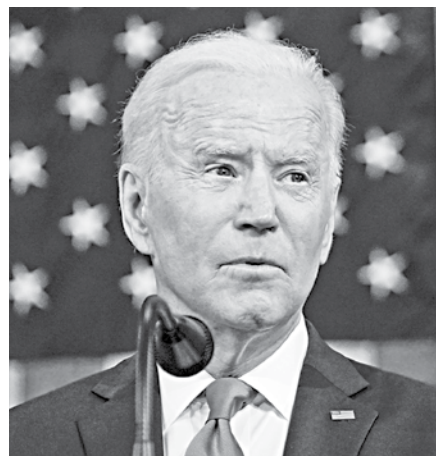


PHOTO: REUTERS

The retreat from Afghanistan has revealed much about the nature of the US government that President Joe Biden is running, and how he runs it.

dented his reputation as a nice guy.

Another factor that may have played a role in shaping Biden's Afghan policy is the striking difference in the nature of the president's foreign and defence policy team and his domestic policy advisers. The latter is comprised of former mayors, governors, members of Congress, and at least one business executive—people of independent standing. But his national security team is dominated by former aides. The soft-spoken Secretary of State Antony Blinken is a loyal, long-time Biden adviser. National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan, a youthful-looking

44-year-old, was Biden's national security adviser as vice-president. Biden often cites the concurrence of his advisers as confirmation of the wisdom of his decisions, but one gets the strong impression that he makes clear to them what advice he wants.

Secretary of Defence Lloyd Austin does carry an aura of independence and gravitas. Austin speaks slowly and carefully, and with the authority that comes almost naturally to a former four-star US Army general. He projects confidence without drama, and holds his views tight. A senator said: "I wouldn't want to play poker with him." Austin managed the draw-down of American troops in Iraq, where he had worked closely with the president's deceased son Beau, both qualifications that undoubtedly stood him well with the president. (Biden's continuing, and maudlin, invocation of Beau, occasionally at truly awkward moments, is beginning to worry even some of his close allies.)

Republicans, who have been frustrated in their search for an effective means to attack Biden, have seized the opportunity provided by the chaotic withdrawal, despite the fact that the decision to end America's 20-year Afghan war was widely popular. Despite this inconsistency on the part of the US electorate, Biden's job-approval ratings have dipped below 50 percent for the first time since the inauguration. Even some Democrats, their fingers held up to the wind, are planning to ask awkward questions of Biden and his team.

But what, exactly, is Biden to be blamed for? His administration is widely charged with not having planned for an evacuation, but Senator Tim Kaine of Virginia, a Democrat and member of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, who deals with the White House a lot, told me: "[The administration] had a plan; they just didn't expect to have to implement it so quickly."

Biden's administration, although less rancorous and leaky than most (thus far), does follow in the tradition of military

and intelligence leaders differing markedly in their assessments of the quality of the Afghan army. Having spent USD 83 billion on training and equipping the Afghan army, the US military has tended to view its efforts as a success. The intelligence agencies have been more sceptical. Kaine said: "For years we heard conflicting assessments about the Afghan military."

Previous US presidents tended to relay to the public the bright side of America's efforts in Afghanistan. In a groundbreaking series published in 2019, *The Washington Post* exposed the lies that presidents George W Bush, Barack Obama, and Trump all told the country, such as how wonderfully the war in Afghanistan was going. Thus, most Americans were unprepared for the sudden collapse of the Afghan army or the flight of Afghan President Ashraf Ghani (with bags of money) when the Taliban stroled into Kabul.

Defence Department officials insist no one warned them that the Afghan army would collapse within 11 days, but this could be a failure of imagination as well as intelligence. In any event, there is intelligence, and then there is how intelligence is interpreted. For example, Bush's administration had received ample evidence that al-Qaeda was preparing to attack the US, even the World Trade Center, but leading figures brushed off the warnings. France, acting on the same intelligence about Afghanistan that the US government had, began to withdraw its troops in 2014.

A shaken Biden administration is now trying to change the subject away from Afghanistan by turning to domestic issues. But extricating itself from the consequences of its Afghanistan decisions, however warranted, may take longer than the administration envisions.

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