

# Global stability, security and prosperity after Covid-19



AK ABDUL MOMEN

MANY countries are battling the second wave of Covid-19. The pandemic has already caused unprecedented devastation, affecting our way of living, the economy, our lives and livelihoods. Covid-19 arrived when nationalism, protectionism and migration controls were rising in many parts of the world. During the pandemic, these forces have certainly amplified as countries scrambled to come up with an effective response to the crisis.

I would like to make a few points to highlight how Covid-19 has impacted us and how we may overcome the challenge posed by it.

First of all, we all agree that Covid-19 has caused a global crisis, unmatched in recent history. Nearly all countries and all people in the world—developed or developing, high or low—have been affected in some way or the other. Perhaps for the first time in human history, we have seen how the fates of billions of people of the world are so closely bound together. The pandemic has tested our public health system. It has tested our leadership. And it has tested our determination in our common fight against an invisible enemy.

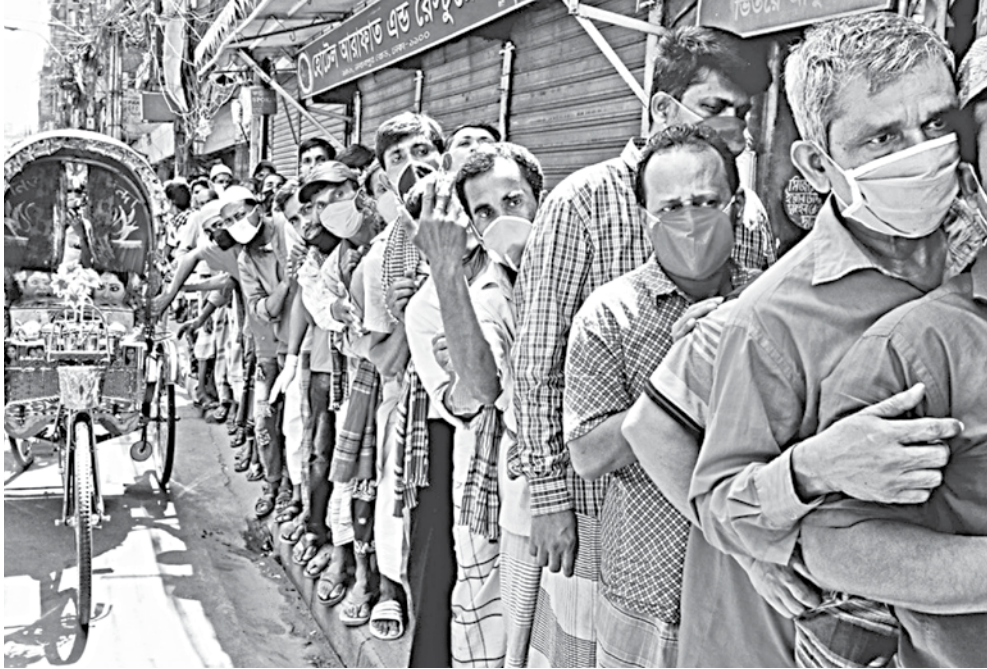
The socio-economic fallouts of the pandemic have been colossal. Prolonged lockdown, school and border closures and movement restrictions have affected nearly all sectors, including the economy, education, healthcare, migration, transport, travel and tourism. The pandemic has threatened to push even the developed economies into economic recession. Those who were already living on the fringes run a real risk of relapsing into the poverty trap. Covid-19 has seriously undermined our ability to reduce poverty, which is the overarching objective of the sustainable development goals. We all know that mass poverty leads to instability, which, in turn, fuels conflicts. The

potentials of pandemic-induced conflicts and security threats, therefore, cannot be entirely overruled.

Like the rest of the world, Bangladesh has also been severely impacted. Indeed, the pandemic has dealt a particular blow to our migrant workers. Bangladesh, a major manpower exporting nation, saw a sharp drop in the number of Bangladeshis going abroad for overseas employment in 2020. For example, between January-August of 2019, around 460,000 Bangladeshi workers went abroad, but during the same period this year, only 176,000 workers could go, which is a decline of nearly 62 percent on a year-to-year basis. To make things worse, between April 1 and September 6, 2020, a total of 1,11,111 migrant workers have returned home, leaving us with the responsibility and challenge to re-skill, reemploy, and re-export these workers or reintegrate them into society.

Fortunately, both our export earnings and remittance have gradually pulled back. Many of the garment orders which were cancelled in the initial days of the pandemic have returned. Even amidst the pandemic, expatriate Bangladeshi workers, our hard-working brothers and sisters toiling abroad have sent home record remittances with the inflows reaching USD 19.8 billion so far this year, which is up 8.2 percent, comfortably beating the gloomy remittance forecasts of the World Bank and IMF. Bangladesh's economy also grew 5.24 percent in FY20, even during the pandemic, which is the highest in Asia. This shows the resilience of our entrepreneurs and workers to fight all the odds with tenacity and determination.

And this is my second point—the fighting spirit of the people of Bangladesh. Historically, the Bengali nation has fought every adversity and disaster with forbearance and fortitude. The father of the Bengali nation, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, taught us to stand firm against all odds and difficulties. Under his leadership, we defeated the oppressive Pakistani regime. And under the visionary leadership of Bangabandhu's accomplished daughter, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, we are determined to defeat the pandemic.



People form a queue on Nabapur Road in Old Dhaka to collect relief materials distributed by a local business house amidst the coronavirus lockdown in the country, on March 29, 2020.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

The way the government and people of Bangladesh have fought Covid-19 remains a shining example for others to emulate. When most countries in the world have struggled to strike a balance between the need to flatten the curve and keeping the economy open, Bangladesh has deftly handled the crisis through bold and decisive early actions and prudent strategy that are effective in keeping the virus under control while putting minimal strain on the economy. While the world has experienced a sombre reality with more than 1.3 million global deaths and hundreds more dying every day—and many more may still die due to food shortage—both the death toll and the number of infections remain much lower in Bangladesh, even though it is a developing country. The economic stimulus packages worth USD 14.14 billion, which is equivalent to 4.3 percent of our total GDP, announced

by Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina early into the pandemic, minimised the impact of the pandemic and cushioned our business, employment and productivity from its negative fallouts. Expansion of social safety nets and its effective and efficient distribution as well as the undertaking of extensive measures to contain the second wave of the pandemic have also helped us to cope with the crisis effectively.

The third point that I would like to make, is this. To surmount the crisis, the pandemic must be fought simultaneously at the global level with unprecedented international cooperation, with all countries on board. For that, we need determined national and global leadership. And we need solidarity—solidarity at the global level and on the national and local levels.

Most importantly, we need effective global institutions. The need for more robust

multilateralism with the United Nations at the forefront and a stronger World Health Organization has never been greater. With fears of a new recession and financial collapse, times like these call for resilient and strong leadership in healthcare, business, government and the wider society.

Now that several vaccines have been developed, this would help us defeat the pandemic, save lives and accelerate our economic recovery. But we need to ensure universal, equitable, timely and affordable access to vaccines for all.

The world must treat the Covid-19 vaccine as a “global public good”. We must recognise that Covid-19 can never be brought under control in one place unless it is brought under control everywhere. Developing countries must receive the transfer of vaccine technology and IP rights waver afforded under the TRIPS Agreement.

A “whole of society” and, indeed, a “whole of the international community” approach is needed to combat the Covid challenges. All of us, the UN, International Financial Institutions, civil society alongside the national governments, must walk together in collaboration and partnership and actively cooperate with each other to fortify us against our common enemy—Covid-19.

Fourthly, when we deal with critical issues, we must be honest and fact-based. We must provide correct briefings based on fact and reality. Although we know that US Secretary of State General Collin Powel, a very respected general, once made a blunder by giving the wrong briefing before the world body regarding weapons of mass destruction in Iraq, that was not unique. The lessons have not been learned. But at this moment, we must be more honest, and we must not play politics with the pandemic.

Finally, let us not forget that it is our duty as human beings to help others. During this pandemic let us commit ourselves to helping humanity as best as we can. Let us create examples for our family members, neighbours and friends so that our community and nation can be proud of us.

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Dr AK Abdul Momen is Foreign Minister of Bangladesh.

## Is Ten Years Not Enough?

### The Politics of Implementing the Domestic Violence (Prevention and Protection) Act

PRAGYNA MAHPARA

WHAT happens when the home becomes a prison and the companion a monster? In Bangladesh, a country with a high rate of domestic violence, it is a sad reality for countless women and children. The Covid-19 lockdown has made matters only worse. According to data from Ain o Salish Kendra, 483 women were reportedly tortured by their husbands during the period of January-October 2020, 43 percent higher than what was reported in the same period in 2019; a similar trend can be observed in the number of women murdered by their husbands. A telephone survey with 53,340 women conducted by Manusher Jonno Foundation (MJF) found that by June a total of 11,025 women had faced domestic violence since the lockdown began. The question is, despite having adequate legislations, why is the country failing to protect its women and children from domestic violence, particularly during these trying times.

The Domestic Violence (Prevention and Protection), or the DVPP, has several progressive provisions, including protection orders for women, right to reside in the marital home, temporary custody of children, and recovery of personal assets and assets acquired during the marriage. The DVPP Act 2010 was a result of an outstanding collaboration between the women's movement and the government. The movement began in the late 80s when *Naripokkho* and a few other organisations started raising the issue of domestic violence as a violation of women's rights. However, when the Women and Children Repression Act 2000 was passed, it failed to address the issue of domestic violence and abuse.

Subsequently in 2002, various civil society organisations, women's rights groups, and legal activists researched domestic violence laws of neighbouring countries and initiated drafting a legislation. Under the “Caretaker Government” in 2006, these organisations came together to form the Citizen's Initiative against Domestic Violence (CIDV) coalition to advance the agenda of legal reform. In 2008, the Ministry of Women and Children Affairs (MOWCA) decided to draft the

of domestic violence as a private matter, and the severity of social repercussions for speaking up against such violence—too many cases remain unreported. This is a major reason for the persistence of domestic violence, despite the Act.

But there are major limitations in the implementation of the Act as well. MOWCA officers still lack adequate training and resources. The number of one-stop crisis centres is inadequate and monitoring

have surfaced during the pandemic. At the beginning of the lockdown, no provisions were made for domestic violence cases. Department of Women Affairs officers and partner organisations were not given directions on how to handle incidences and complaints of domestic violence during the lockdown. For the first three months of the lockdown (March-May), service providers and law enforcement officers were busy dealing with the Covid situation, and thus domestic violence cases were not prioritised. Law enforcement agencies were also busy distributing food and essentials among poverty-stricken people. Shelter homes were unable to admit survivors due to lack of testing kits. There were no instructions from MOWCA to local officers regarding the provision of support and service to survivors during the crisis, and the helpline (109) only provided advice or referrals, but no direct support. If survivors reported to the police stations for filing complaints, instead of registering complaints, they were referred to organisations such as Brac's Human Rights and Legal Aid Services. The *Nari Desk* (women's desk) at the police stations became inactive. Trials did not take place, as the courts were closed countrywide.

Gradually the issue of domestic violence started receiving attention from the mainstream and social media and organisations working on it, trying to create a sense of urgency. The shelter homes are now able to admit survivors if they come after being tested. The CIDV and the Rape Law Reform Coalitions proposed introducing virtual courts and an ordinance, allowing courts to hold trials digitally; this was approved by the prime minister. But many survivors do not have access to mobile phones or the internet. So, the success of

the initiative is doubtful, as access to justice has now become synonymous with access to technology. And the National Recovery Plan of the government does not address violence against women at all, which makes one wonder whether the government truly realises the severity of domestic violence during COVID.

In a predominantly patriarchal society with strong gender norms and stigma against women, like that in Bangladesh, enacting legislations against domestic violence is already a herculean endeavour. Add to that, the weaknesses in implementation and the absence of urgency and priority from policymakers. Then the question remains, is 10 years enough; or will it ever be enough?

Bangladesh has urged its development partners and the private sector to support national efforts for post-Covid recovery. Initiatives for combating climate change and health distress are given significant priority. However, VAW issues are not addressed under these. This dilutes the recognition of the severity of domestic violence cases during the Covid period. Prevention and redress of DV in this period should be integrated with the recovery plan.

Violence which occurs in the family space is not a personal or familial issue but is a violation of the right to bodily integrity; it should be treated the same way as the violence that happens in public or at the workplace. This understanding has to be developed among service providers, law enforcement authorities, communities and families so that those who are affected are supported to speak out, protest the abuse and seek remedies.

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Pragyna Mahpara, Research Associate, Brac Institute of Governance and Development (BIGD), Brac University

#### QUOTABLE Quote



**DESMOND TUTU**  
(Born 1931)  
South African archbishop.

*My humanity is bound up in yours, for we can only be human together.*

#### CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

##### ACROSS

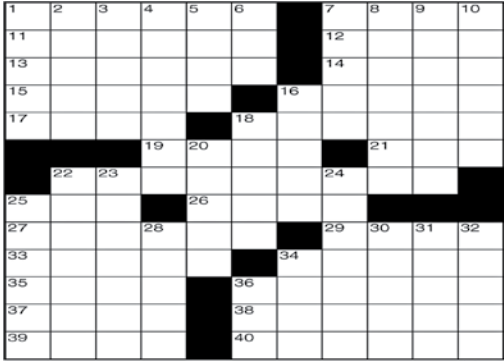
- 1 Seize
- 5 Useful skill
- 10 Take the bus
- 11 Frightens
- 13 High cards
- 14 Arizona city famed for its red rocks
- 15 Navy rank
- 17 Sonar user
- 18 Consign
- 19 Angry state
- 20 Baseball's Mel
- 21 South African farmer
- 22 – acids
- 25 Flexes
- 26 “Phooey!”
- 27 Slight, in slang

- 28 DVR's forerunner
- 29 Moves with speed
- 33 Lyricist Gershwin
- 34 Sailor
- 35 Roman magistrate
- 37 Norway's capital
- 38 Car part
- 39 German denial
- 40 Transmits
- 41 Dreary shade

##### DOWN

- 1 Effortless charm
- 2 Puerto –
- 3 Skilled
- 4 “Hang in there!”
- 5 Help out
- 6 Fragrance
- 7 Despondent
- 8 Canyon creator
- 9 Like some profs
- 12 Cavalry swords
- 16 Car
- 21 Oscar category
- 22 Words to the wise
- 23 Vowel marks
- 24 Close enough to hit
- 25 Robin or wren
- 27 Washington airport
- 29 Hunting dog
- 30 Bright beam
- 31 Carl's wife in “Up”
- 32 Hardhearted
- 36 Confession topic

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#### YESTERDAY'S ANSWERS



#### BETTER BAILEY

BY MORT WALKER



#### BABY BLUES

BY KIRKMAN & SCOTT

