

PROJECT SYNDICATE

The Covid Revolution



BEVERLEY MCLACHLIN

his emancipation plan to Congress. "The dogmas of the quiet past are inadequate to the stormy present," he declared. "The occasion is piled high with difficulty, and we must rise with the occasion. As our case is new, so we must think anew, and act anew."

In the wake of the Covid-19 crisis, that is our task as well.

Lincoln saw clearly that the Civil War would utterly change the United States, and that in the world that would

too many sought to revive the past. Instead of heeding Lincoln's call to think and act anew, the southern states built a new regime of segregation and discrimination.

Three-quarters of a century later, another epic conflict would again shift hitherto prevailing norms. World War II erupted in a late-industrial world that, by today's standards, was local and slow. True, motor vehicles had replaced horse-drawn transport, and early commercial aircraft were flying a privileged few to faraway places. But much remained as it had been for decades. Men controlled business, industry, government, and finance, with women largely relegated to the domestic sphere. Vast swaths of the world—including India, Africa, and South Asia—strained under the yoke of colonialism.

WWII changed everything. In its aftermath, cars became faster, and planes sleeker and swifter. Women



A family member holds the hand of a vaccine recipient as he sits on a wheelchair at the post-vaccination waiting room at Dhaka Medical College, on February 10, 2021.

PHOTO: STAR

While we have developed vaccines internationally to fight a global contagion—new thinking and new action for a new case, as Lincoln would have put it—we are reverting to old nationalist norms at the delivery stage. Countries and blocs of countries, largely in the affluent West, are adopting an "us-first" attitude that makes no moral or practical sense.

follow, old norms and mindsets would no longer suffice. He was right. The tragedy is that he only partly succeeded in persuading his fellow Americans to accept the new norm he proposed—equality for all. Some political leaders thought and acted in a new way, but

assumed a growing role in society, the economy, and governance. But the nuclear age loomed large, bringing with it the new threat of mass destruction.

The world thus needed new ways of thinking and acting in order not to blow itself up. Governments

and statesmen rose to the occasion, establishing new multilateral institutions such as the United Nations and forging treaties aimed at deterring nuclear attack. New global agencies like the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and the World Health Organization (WHO) tackled problems of starvation and illness. And while all this was happening, new independent countries emerged from colonial domination.

Fast-forward another 75 years, and the world is once again facing a radical challenge to norms it had come to take for granted. The pandemic, it turns out, is not only a scourge but also a source of revelation. It has revealed that post-war institutions, though still functioning, are tired and need revitalising. It has exposed the costs of systemic weaknesses that enabled populists and extremists to gain power in many places. Above all, it has

demonstrated that, regardless of where we live, we are all in this together.

If the fear after WWII was nuclear annihilation, the fear now is global disease. Covid-19—and the recurring pandemics experts tell us to expect in the future—is a global phenomenon from beginning to end. We are accustomed to seeing the same diseases in different parts of the world, but never had we faced one requiring every country to take the same precautions, at the same time, lest we all fall victim. The cure for Covid-19—although the disease is unlikely ever to be fully eradicated—must be global, too.

Within days of China releasing the genetic composition of the novel coronavirus on January 10, 2020, scientists around the world were working to develop vaccines. The effort relied on global science, with international nanotechnology research leading to a new form of

vaccine (messenger RNA). This again proved French chemist Louis Pasteur's observation that "science knows no country, because knowledge belongs to humanity, and is the torch which illuminates the world."

But we have now run into a roadblock. While we have developed vaccines internationally to fight a global contagion—new thinking and new action for a new case, as Lincoln would have put it—we are reverting to old nationalist norms at the delivery stage. Countries and blocs of countries, largely in the affluent West, are adopting an "us-first" attitude that makes no moral or practical sense.

Morally, we know that relegating poorer developing countries to the back of the vaccine line is the wrong thing to do. And, as a practical matter, we know it won't work. In the past, a country's population might have been able to shelter from disease behind reinforced borders. But this will not work in a hyper-connected world.

Because none of us will be safe from Covid-19 until everyone is, the only way to defeat it is by attacking it globally. As long as there are countries or pockets of people where the virus is being transmitted, there will be new cases and, even more frightening, new variants. Some of these may prove more lethal and—the great fear—impervious to the vaccines that represent our only hope of conquering the virus.

Global challenges require global solutions, and today the occasion is again piled high with difficulty. To end the pandemic and navigate the stormy present, we must heed Lincoln's call and develop new norms to replace our worn-out, insular beliefs.

Beverley McLachlin, Chief Justice of Canada from 2000-2017, is a member of the Global Commission for Post-Pandemic Policy.

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Do mothers ever leave us?



HABIBULLAH N KARIM

WE are brought into this world by our mothers with whom we have an inseparable "biome" connection. Growing up in a well-tended

cooking repertoire. She had raised cooking to an art form: even her simple *jhal-muri* concoction would have guests scratching their heads over how palatable and addictive her servings were. We had it good at home because of her exceptional cooking ability but that also meant we had a real hard time (and still do) stomaching food at social dinners and on nights out at restaurants that fell short of her standard.

main gate in the middle of the night. As I came down in my sleeping robe to investigate it, my mother quickly jumped to her feet and followed after me. When I came out, I found three policemen with a piece of paper which they explained was an arrest warrant for someone apparently residing at our address, though no one matching the age, gender, name or description of that person lived there. My mother was quite straightforward with the police

Their earthly entanglements seem to fade away with time but the love that mothers give us is for a renewal of the cycle of love that is unmistakably unselfish in nature.



PHOTO: REUTERS

'In life, mothers surround us with their unmitigated love and when they leave, that connection is temporarily lost, leaving us in utter despair.'

In her quintessential motherly way, she was always protective of her children, always looking out for us even when we were all grown-up. Especially since we lost our father to cancer in the early nineties, she had been the sheet anchor of the family, constantly fretting about the well-being of her three children and four grandchildren. I remember a few months after my father passed away, we were awakened by loud knocks on our

and made sure they did not run off with her son by mistake! Her courage knew no bounds when it came to matters of her family.

She was never very comfortable with smartphones or touchphones, as was the case for most of her generation. Two state-of-the-art smartphones given as gifts by her grandson and her daughter always lay beside her—she would never pick them up. One day, I was very late in returning home when

even our maids were asleep and I was shocked to see a call coming from my "digitally-challenged" mother. She somehow managed to place a call to me to enquire where I was and when I was coming home using one of the phones even though I had never seen her use either of them. Her love for me triumphed over her disinclination to use touchphones.

When I got married in the late nineties, my mother welcomed into the family someone who had also lost her father early on. My wife's mother became my second mother. My guardian angels must have been looking over me as I could not have imagined a more loving and doting mother-in-law. Sometimes even my in-laws probably felt jealous of her unrelenting love towards me.

But having been fortunate to have two doting mothers—Amma and Ma—for more than two decades, it was extremely painful and mind-numbing to have lost them both within the span of three weeks last year, just before the onset of the pandemic.

The vacuum that their heavenward departure created in our earthbound hearts is unfathomable. In life, mothers surround us with their unmitigated love and when they leave, that connection is temporarily lost, leaving us in utter despair. This feeling of detachment is aptly captured by Rumi in his couplet: "We are born of love; love is our mother." And a mother's

love finds its way back into our lives as we find the constant reminders of their lives in our home, the places we visited together, the joyful moments we spent together, and remembering the happiness in their eyes as they saw us grow and become what we are.

But old-age infirmities and debilitating medical conditions sometimes weaken that connection even when they are still around. For Amma, it was heart-breaking for us to see her lose her precious memories, her mental alertness and gradually her mobility. For Ma, it was equally traumatic to see her give up on her daily walks and enquiring about the well-being of the guard's daughter next door, or checking up on a neighbour's marigolds.

Even as they started vanishing away right before our eyes, they never lost a chance to give us a warm smile from their deathbeds, as if to say, "don't worry about us, we will always love you."

And their earthly entanglements seem to fade away with time but the love that mothers give us is for a renewal of the cycle of love that is unmistakably unselfish in nature.

How do we make sense of the world without them? Because, in the words of Abraham Lincoln, "All that I am or ever hope to be, I owe to my angel mother."

Habibullah N Karim is founder of Technohaven Co Ltd, co-founder of BASIS, and coordinator of Blockchain Olympiad Bangladesh.

QUOTABLE Quote

LES BROWN
American motivational speaker and author.

In every day, there are 1,440 minutes. That means we have 1,440 daily opportunities to make a positive impact.

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS

- 1 Halt
- 5 Cuts, as coupons
- 10 Writer Morrison
- 11 Tape player button
- 13 Yoked animals
- 14 Penitent person
- 15 Painter Van Gogh
- 17 Arthur of "Maude"
- 18 Lasts
- 19 Sleeve filter
- 20 Relieve (of)
- 21 "Not guilty," for one
- 22 Cider fruit
- 25 Desolate areas
- 26 Lane of The Daily Planet
- 27 60 secs.

DOWN

- 1 Kitchen cooker
- 2 Deadly substance
- 3 Without letup
- 4 Option at the hair stylist
- 5 Stretched to see
- 6 Playwright Tracy
- 7—Jima
- 8 Arcade game
- 9 Showed derision
- 12 O'Neill works
- 16 Pennsylvania port
- 21 Twirling toy
- 22 Resion of eastern France
- 23 Deadly substances
- 24 Tiny opening
- 25 Marionette mover
- 27 Some Impressionist paintings
- 29 Palm (off)
- 30 Blood line
- 31 Bit of gossip
- 32 Guzzled
- 36 Peculiarity

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YESTERDAY'S ANSWERS

S	T	R	A	P	S	M	A	S	T
T	R	I	V	I	A	A	V	O	W
R	E	S	E	N	T	C	A	M	O
E	V	E	N	T	T	O	T	E	M
W	I	N	G	C	A	N	A	D	A
F	I	T	S	B	I	T	S	Y	
F	O	R	L	I	A	R			
A	W	A	K	E	N	E	A	T	S
C	E	D	A	R	D	A	F	O	E
E	Y	E	R	C	O	S	I	N	E
T	O	I	L	A	D	O	R	E	D
S	U	N	S	L	O	N	E	R	S

BEETLE BAILEY BY MORT WALKER

BABY BLUES BY KIRKMAN & SCOTT