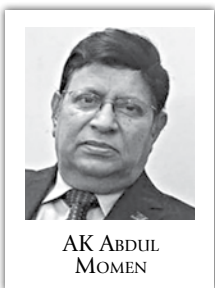


The changing nature of global conflicts: Role of UN peacekeepers



AK ABDUL MOMEN

PEACEKEEPING operations (PKOs) are one of the United Nations' most visible activities. These save thousands of lives every year and are vital to the peaceful resolution of conflicts—an essential force to maintain stability

in post-conflict countries. As the top troops and police contributing country, Bangladesh continues to make an enormous contribution to the UN peacekeeping operations.

Bangladeshi peacekeepers, the country's men and women in blue helmets, have been a great torchbearer of the Bangladesh brand abroad, inspired by Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's foreign policy doctrine, "Friendship to all, malice towards none," and our constitutional obligation to support peacekeeping under the UN umbrella. Bangladesh has been participating in the UN peacekeeping missions since 1988. The glorious 1971 Liberation War of Bangladesh, when the nation experienced genocide, persecution, displacement and torture, also deeply motivated Bangladesh to seek global peace and work to improve the plight of persecuted populations, irrespective of geographical boundaries.

Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, in his maiden UNGA speech in 1974, stated "Peace is an imperative for the survival of humanity. It represents the deepest aspirations of men and women throughout the world." This people-centric and value-driven approach towards global peace has been the guiding principle of our engagement with the UN peacekeeping operations over the last three decades.

The PKOs have become more complex and diverse. The often hybrid nature of modern peacekeeping operations involves a wide range of military and civilian activities across the conflict management spectrum, together with various institutions working in parallel in peacekeeping and peace building programmes.

Armed conflicts today are mostly intra-state rather than inter-state, and peacekeepers are often called to engage a changing profile of armed/militant groups who often resort to terrorist or guerrilla tactics, or are interconnected with organised crime. Peacekeepers are also required to confront and neutralise groups and outfits in possession of a new generation of weapons.

Today's conflicts have a number of drivers

that are different from those of even a decade ago. Two emerging trends are increasingly impacting the conflict landscape: new technologies and sophisticated weaponry. In many respects, technology has enabled a much wider range of actors to become influential players in violent conflict, whether it is the use of social media platforms for recruitment into armed groups, dark web transfers of resources to violent actors, or the weaponisation of emerging technologies.

Added to this complex scenario is the current uncertainty of Covid-19. The pandemic is poised to cause a severe economic downturn globally, which may be most keenly felt in fragile states with lesser financial or social safeguards. Generally, economic downturns tend to generate the kinds of social unrest that often trigger violent conflicts. Covid-19 is expected to contribute to higher risks of instability in the coming years.

The nature of peacekeeping operations has also been transformed, both in terms of scale and scope. Peacekeeping missions today are more than a truce-supervising operation. In fact, peacekeeping in the present world performs multi-dimensional activities, ranging from peace enforcement and peacekeeping to peace-building. Responsibilities have further expanded to include other dimensions of peace, such as establishing rule of law, protecting human rights, protecting women and children, supporting political processes, managing elections, reintegration and socio-economic development.

Access to the local population becomes

particularly relevant when considering the current nature of conflicts. Generally, women constitute almost 50 percent of the local population. Therefore, today's peacekeepers have to be extra sensitive to women's needs and rights.

Given these trends, with threats to peace in the world proliferating and crises growing increasingly complex, the UN peace operations need to adapt continually to make them better suited to 21st century conflicts.

information for their mission. Realising the role of women in peacekeeping and peace building, Bangladesh spearheaded the landmark resolution of UNSC 1325 on women, peace and security.

Fourth, peacekeeping operations should be designed to analyse and respond to how local, national, and regional actors form an interdependent network. The current configurations of UN peace operations are not adequately suited to these tasks,

as a node in a system in which change is driven by countless factors.

Bangladesh remains committed to UN peacekeeping and makes all endeavours to ready its forces, keeping in mind the changing nature of conflicts and the complexity of modern peacekeeping operations.

Apart from our leading role in peacekeeping, Bangladesh has also shown a remarkable contribution to peace-building activities. Within the limited mandate, Bangladeshi peacekeepers have demonstrated outstanding success in mobilising the affected population in various nation-building activities. Our female peacekeepers have placed themselves as the key driving forces to reduce gender-based violence, conflict and confrontation, providing a sense of security, especially for women and children, mentoring female police officers in local areas, and thus empowering women in the host country and promoting social cohesion.

We are proud of the achievements of the Bangladeshi blue helmets. Our peacekeepers aptly complement our peace-centric foreign policy vision. They are rendering the world a selfless service by faithfully carrying out their share of the responsibility with other partners to achieve a peaceful global order.

All said and done, it is important to note that UN peacekeeping is a temporal phenomenon. To have sustainable peace and stability, it is important to create a mindset of respect and tolerance towards others, irrespective of ethnicity, race or religion.

Violence, war and conflicts are increasing across nations, uprooting millions of people from their homes and countries, largely due to the spread of the venom of hatred and ignorance. Currently, 1.1 million Rohingyas who were persecuted on their own land are being sheltered temporarily in Bangladesh. They are uprooted because of the spread of hatred against them for years. However, they are not the only ones.

In order to have sustainable peace and stability across nations, Bangladesh has been promoting a concept of "Culture of Peace". It promotes a mindset of respect and tolerance towards others, irrespective of ethnicity, race and religion. If we can create such a mindset, we can hope to have a sustainable world of peace and stability. However, such a mindset cannot be created alone by a government. It needs proactive support from parents, teachers, academics, community leaders, opinion builders and activists and, more importantly, leaders of synagogues, mosques, temples and churches. Let us take a vow to achieve such a mindset.

Dr AK Abdul Momen is Foreign Minister of Bangladesh.



PHOTO: COLLECTED

Peacekeeping operations may consider several strategies to be more effective in the face of the changing nature of conflicts.

First, instead of having sprawling mandates covering many issues, future missions may be entrusted with a much smaller set of tasks with clear focus and priorities.

Second, better synergies among all actors in various phases, starting from mandate setting and peace consolidation to exit strategy, are key. All stakeholders, including the UNSC, troop-contributing countries and the host countries, must show adaptability and prudence in forging meaningful partnerships.

Third, women and children are often the main victims of violence in conflicts, particularly sexual abuse, and it is often difficult for male peacekeepers to cross the social and cultural boundaries required to build trust. This is where female peacekeepers can fill the gap by providing women and children a greater sense of security, foster their trust and, in the process, gather valuable

particularly those requiring analysis and engagement with the political economy of conflict and also addressing the risks of asymmetric security threats.

Fifth, medical capacity building and resource allocation for health-related contingencies need to get strong focus in our policy discourses on peacekeeping. Preparedness to address challenges, such as the one we are confronted with now (Covid-19), has to be embedded in future planning and mandate setting of peacekeeping missions.

Sixth, as socioeconomic factors will largely dictate future conflicts—whether it is loss of livelihoods, global economic downturns caused by a pandemic, or deepening inequalities resulting from a combination of urbanisation, uneven growth, and new technologies in the hands of a few—the UN, over time, will need to embrace the interrelated nature of conflicts more than it does today. Peace operations should be seen

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Menstrual hygiene management: Ensuring affordability and accessibility



SYEDA TASFIA TASNEEM

THE basic human right to manage menstruation without facing economic constraints and social stigma is often perceived as

a privilege for girls across the globe. Period poverty—which relates to the inaccessibility to affordable menstrual hygiene tools, safe and private toilets, adequate water and sanitation, and waste management—is a global concern. Furthermore, it acts as one of the major obstacles to girls and women going to schools and workplaces till date.

While developed countries like Scotland are taking revolutionary steps towards ending period poverty through legal bindings on local authorities to ensure free provision of period products for anyone who needs them, much of the developing world still struggles with tackling the stigma around menstruation. In some parts of the world, women are still ostracised away from basic day-to-day activities, including travelling outside homes and attending religious and social events, due to the cultural stigma attached to menstruation. Although Bangladesh has been lauded for achieving gender parity on various fronts, the issue of period poverty has not received much attention or priority in national policy debates.

According to the National Hygiene Survey conducted in 2018, 30 percent of girls have reported missing school for an average of 2.5 days per month owing to periods, while only 23 percent of schoolgirls have access to private toilets with water and adequate facilities at school. Menstrual health education is still largely absent in schools, leaving most girls unprepared and unequipped for managing their own menstruation properly. A significant proportion of women still rely on old cloth or rags to manage their periods, which are often not washed and dried properly, giving rise to potential health problems.

Another problem unique to menstruation is the period tax. That is, sanitary products for women often have a certain proportion of tax attached to them. Issues related to unaffordability and inaccessibility gradually mobilised advocacy against the period tax worldwide. Previously, such campaigns were also seen to be fruitful in India, resulting in the removal of a 12 percent tax on sanitary products in 2018. Many local activists and NGOs in Bangladesh came together to advance the idea that the period tax was an unfair burden on women, particularly those who are already financially disadvantaged,

impact of this temporary tax relief measure is yet to be evaluated, and concerns have started to arise regarding changes in tax policy in the upcoming budget that may reverse any progress that has been achieved. Moreover, despite the removal of supplemental duties, the total tax incidence of sanitary napkins still remains staggeringly high because of additional VAT on production, sales tax, regulatory duties, etc. Ultimately, this contributes to a high retail price and prevents women from shifting to hygienic disposable pads.

Failure to ensure public-private initiatives around price and tax reforms for menstrual products at

With increased economic insecurity caused by the pandemic, women are also likely to face an erosion of their autonomy and control in household decision-making and consumption. In such a scenario, economic disruptions and withdrawal of policies designed to improve affordability will lead to girls losing access to safe and hygienic menstrual products. This, in turn, will significantly impact women's participation in education and employment, making them more susceptible to exclusion, discrimination, health complications, and violence.

Therefore, it is crucial to ensure appropriate policies that encourage local manufacturers to produce these products at an affordable price. While changing consumption behaviour overnight may be difficult, education and awareness can bring about positive changes in normalising periods, and informing girls regarding the proper usage of cloths and other alternatives to minimise health hazards. It is also important to remember that, in times of public emergencies such as the Covid-19 pandemic, deprivations are often exacerbated. Ensuring ways to provide

sanitary napkins to women amid nationwide lockdowns and mitigating any supply chain disruptions that may cause a shortage in supply must be a part of the national response to the pandemic. Ensuring menstrual hygiene for nurses, doctors, community health workers, and patients through access to toilets and WASH facilities in hospitals and makeshift quarantine and isolation facilities must also be prioritised.

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Protests in India led to the removal of a 12 percent tax on sanitary products in 2018.

PHOTO: AFP

in accessing a basic health necessity product. This movement led the National Board of Revenue (NBR) to remove supplemental duties on imported raw materials used in the manufacturing of sanitary products for a period of two years between July 2019 and June 2021. However, some conditions were laid out for local manufacturers to avail the exemption, including expanding investment by at least 30 percent to ensure value addition and employing at least 250 workers in the factory. The conditions favoured mostly the big companies that already owned the majority of the market share and did not directly contribute to creating an enabling environment for small and medium enterprises to enter the market.

The complete social and economic

such a critical time will further add to the woes of women across the country. The pandemic's regressive impact on gender equality has been witnessed globally, as women in most parts of the world were disproportionately affected by the increased burden of domestic unpaid work and job losses. Although female labour force participation has gradually increased in Bangladesh over the last 50 years, women are still largely engaged in informal and low-paid jobs, rendering them more vulnerable to external economic shocks. What is even more concerning is the prevalence of intra-household inequality—an unequal allocation of resources among family members—making it difficult to uncover women's precarious socio-economic situations.

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Dated: 11-04-2021

e-Tender Notice

This is to notify all concern that the following tender have published through e-GP portal.

Tender ID, Package No. & Date of Publishing	Nome of Work	Last Selling and Closing Date & Time.
ID : 567012 No.DZ(e-GP)-21/Dev/2020-2021 Publishing : 11-04-2021.	Reconstruction of Flexible Pavement, Earthwork, Surfacing, RCC Box Culvert and Protective Work Etc of Panchdona - Danga-Ghorashal Road (Z-2047) (Danga Bazar to Islampur kheaghat) at Ch. 2+700 to 8+100 and Dhanga-Islampur-Kheaghat Road (Z-2048) at Ch. 0+000 to 3+500 Under Narsingdi Road Division During the Year of 2020-2021. (WP-2)	11-May-2021 17:00 12-May-2021 13:00

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