



VISUAL: KAZI TAH SIN AGAZ APURBO

The harsh reality of domestic abuse in our society



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The Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics 2024 survey on violence against women presents a sobering reality of the extent of abuse faced by women across the country.

The survey reveals that a significant proportion of Bangladeshi women have been subjected to intimate partner violence (IPV), with 54 percent of women reporting physical and/or sexual abuse by their husbands at some point in their lives. IPV remains a dominant form of abuse (76 percent), with the survey showing that 70 percent of women have encountered some form of violence during their lifetimes.

In the past year alone, 41 percent of women reported being victims of abuse by their intimate partner, a significant figure when compared to the 73 percent lifetime prevalence reported in the 2015 survey. The data also highlights that over 76 percent of women across the country experience IPV during their lifetime.

This represents a distressingly high incidence of domestic abuse, with the figures reflecting both the persistence and the normalisation of such violence in many households.

Among the divisions, Barishal and Khulna report the highest IPV rates at 81.5 percent, while Sylhet has the lowest at 72.1 percent. The capital shows an IPV rate of 72.9 percent, with other regions such as Chattogram and Mymensingh also reporting alarming figures.

In fact, the percentage is above 70 in every division.

Such prevalence of IPV despite regional variation suggests that IPV is not limited to any specific area but is a widespread issue that affects women regardless of their location.

Controlling behaviours and emotional abuse were identified as the most common forms of IPV, pointing to the significant psychological toll that this violence takes on women. The fact that many women suffer in silence—64 percent of victims never sharing their experiences with anyone—further underlines the deeply ingrained social stigmas surrounding domestic abuse. Many

women fear that speaking out will damage their family's reputation, put their children's wellbeing at risk, or that violence is simply seen as "a part of married life".

The findings of this survey are a wake-up call for the government and society as a whole. While much progress has been made in raising awareness about gender-based violence, there is still much more to be done.

Media reports over the past year have highlighted the devastating impact of IPV on women in Bangladesh. One recent incident involved a woman in Chattogram who was severely beaten by her husband, leading to her hospitalisation. Another case from Dhaka saw a woman attacked by her spouse after a domestic dispute over dowry. These incidents highlight the urgency of addressing the root causes of IPV, which are often deeply rooted in patriarchal attitudes and a culture of impunity for perpetrators.

When domestic violence leads to marital rape

Marital rape—a concept that South Asian populations often struggle to grasp due to deeply entrenched patriarchal norms—is another horrifying extension of domestic violence. In many communities, the notion that a husband can rape his wife is incomprehensible because it challenges the assumption that men have an inherent entitlement to sexual access within marriage. Society often questions, "He is her husband, how can it be rape?"—failing to understand the fundamental principle of "consent."

Domestic violence poses significant physical, emotional, and psychological dangers to victims, often creating an environment of fear and helplessness. In many cases, the abusive behaviours escalate over time, leading to a cycle of control and manipulation that leaves the victim feeling trapped and powerless. The constant threat of violence can have long-lasting effects, including trauma, depression, and anxiety. In extreme cases, domestic violence

can extend to marital rape, where an abuser forces sexual intercourse upon their partner without consent. Because it occurs within the supposed "safety of a relationship," victims may feel even more isolated and reluctant to speak out.

What about the child brides?

Additionally, child marriage remains a significant and disturbing issue in Bangladesh, despite efforts to reduce its prevalence. According to various reports, around 29 percent of girls in Bangladesh are married before the age of 18, which is among the highest rates in the world. In some rural areas, the numbers can be even higher and the age can be as young as 10.

This cultural practice is often driven by socio-economic factors, traditional norms, and sometimes the desire to protect young girls from potential harm or to relieve financial burdens. However, child marriage exposes girls to a range of dangers, particularly in the form of domestic violence and marital rape, which, in this case, is child rape.

According to child psychologists, child brides, due to their age, may lack the emotional maturity and resources to navigate marital relationships and may not have the knowledge or power to resist abuse. This power imbalance in such marriages, with older husbands often exerting control over their much younger wives, further increases the risk of domestic violence.

Furthermore, child brides are less likely to even understand their rights and seek help, as they are often isolated from family and friends and have limited access to support systems. Early marriage almost always leads to early childbearing, which carries its own health risks and adds to the emotional and physical strain on young girls. This then makes them even more vulnerable to continued abuse.

In light of the survey findings, the way forward must include stronger legal protections for women and especially female children, increased support for victims, and a more proactive approach to prevention.

The 2024 BBS survey is not just a snapshot of the current situation; it is a call to action for the government, civil society, and international partners to work together to create a safer, more equitable society for women in Bangladesh.

It is time for us to finally accept that sex education is imperative for our society to not just thrive but to survive.

What's so special about Bangladesh?



Dan Mozena
is former US ambassador to Bangladesh.

DAN MOZENA

It is no secret that Bangladesh, long ago, captured and continues to hold my heart. As I commented on that sad day a decade ago when I departed Dhaka at the end of my ambassadorship, "I am leaving Bangladesh, but my heart is staying behind," so it remains.

Those who know my enduring affection for Bangladesh sometimes ask, "What is so special about Bangladesh?" This question has a simple answer: the people—the wonderful people of Bangladesh—are the reason that the country is so special for me. During my tenure as US ambassador to Bangladesh, I visited all 64 districts, and everywhere I travelled I saw Bangladesh men and women—farmers, village women, teachers, medical workers, street vendors, shopkeepers, businesspeople,

toppling the previous regime is not an end, but only a step to the larger goal of building the new Bangladesh. History shows that revolutionaries, upon achieving their immediate goal of toppling the existing power structure, often then turn upon each other in a battle for power, until one leader emerges on top and other would-be leaders are vanquished or worse. The students, to their great credit, have learned from Bangladesh's history and have chosen a different path. Instead of wrestling among themselves for power, they joined together and reached out to Bangladesh's most distinguished luminary, Professor Muhammad Yunus, to provide leadership to their enterprise.

Professor Yunus is an inspired choice. He has no personal political agenda; he does not seek power for

done right in launching Bangladesh on a democratic trajectory, where it has made mistakes, and where it must do better. Standing together, the people and the transitional government can get it right in laying the foundation for the new Bangladesh.

Most critical now is for the interim government to sustain citizens' hope that this time, Bangladesh will triumph in building democracy. This is a tough challenge as the interim government must deliver on many fronts, including i) ensuring safety and security for all citizens; ii) providing quality education, health care and other basics of life; iii) undertaking an effective campaign against corruption; iv) fostering an economy that provides jobs and improves standards of living; v) holding accountable members of the previous government who committed the most egregious acts against the people; vi) rehabilitating people connected to the previous government implicated in lesser acts against the people perhaps by establishing a truth and reconciliation process, along the lines of the South African model. Such a process could enable these individuals to publicly acknowledge



The student-led July-August uprising aspired for a new Bangladesh, where citizens could participate freely and safely in building better futures for themselves.

FILE PHOTO: AMRAN HOSSAIN

ready-made garment workers—all working hard and creatively to build a peaceful, secure, prosperous, healthy and, aspirationally, democratic Bangladesh, a far cry from the "international basket case" that a US diplomat envisioned in 1971 for the then newly-independent nation.

Last July and August, the magic and wonder of the Bangladeshi people were on full display as the nation threw off the cloak of authoritarianism and oppression that had suffocated the people. This revolution was led by students who seek a new Bangladesh that enables citizens to participate freely and safely in building better futures for themselves, their families and their communities. Is this too much to expect? I don't think so, and neither do the students, so they persist in their pursuit of the new Bangladesh. Sadly, some made the ultimate sacrifice to this end during the July-August uprising.

This is not the first time in Bangladesh's history that the people declared "enough" and threw off oppression. Those earlier endeavours to emancipate the people did not end well, as forces of oppression re-emerged and again subjected the people to tyranny.

I believe this time it could be different. The students realise that

himself; and he has nothing more to prove—he is already a Nobel laureate. I believe he seeks simply to help his beloved Bangladesh find its way through these challenging times. The revolution is an historic opportunity to realise the long-elusive dream of a free, democratic Bangladesh, a dream that has tragically been crushed repeatedly in Bangladesh's short but turbulent history. The path ahead is treacherous. As Bangladesh struggles to recraft itself, some want Bangladesh to fail in its pursuit of democracy; extremists and others see opportunities for advancing their own agendas. Others, filled with rage and anger, lash out to exact retribution from those perceived as implementing or benefiting from the atrocities perpetrated by the previous government.

These negative forces are destabilising. They deepen hate and divide people at a time when Bangladeshis must stand united to create a durable democracy that brings peace and prosperity to all citizens. To that end, there is only one game in town: the interim government under the leadership of Professor Yunus. I hope all Bangladeshis will stand behind this transitional government by helping the government see what it has

their past transgressions, ask for forgiveness from victims, and commit themselves to Bangladesh's emerging democracy. Finally, the electoral process can be reformed so Bangladeshis can effectively voice their political views, either by creating new political parties or by the erstwhile opposition parties recreating themselves by implementing internal democratic processes that enable party members to freely choose their party's leaders.

I appreciate the gravity and severity of these challenges. Nonetheless, I am confident the people of Bangladesh, in partnership with the interim government, will prevail in addressing these challenges, thus setting the stage for electoral reforms that enable citizens to freely participate in the democratic process.

Is this simply wishful thinking on the part of someone who loves Bangladesh? I think not. Bangladeshis know that this is a critical juncture in their nation's history. Bangladeshis have seen their dream of a democratic Bangladesh crushed too many times. Bangladeshis will not accept the return of autocracy; they will accept nothing less than democracy.

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS

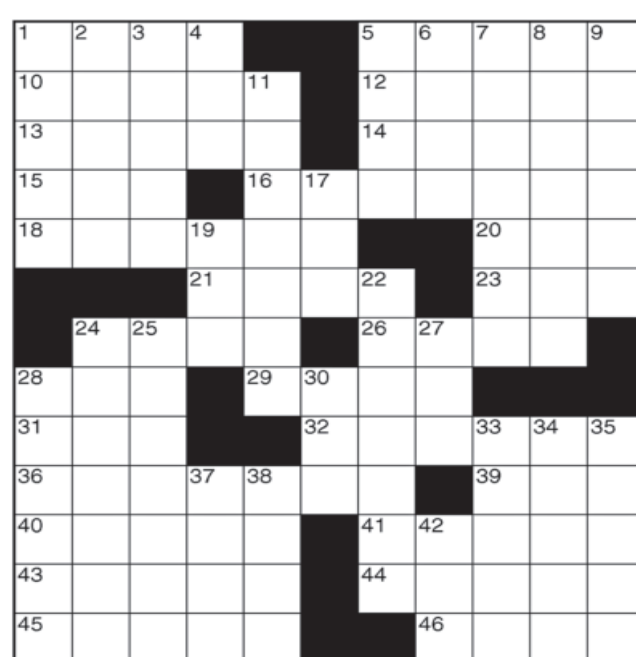
- 1 Baby's bed
- 5 Multiplied by
- 10 Gave an edge
- 12 Operative
- 13 Holmes's beloved Irene
- 14 Terra _____
- 15 Notice
- 16 Stifle
- 18 May honoree
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- 21 Banish
- 23 Composer Rorem
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- 26 Formerly owned
- 28 Singer Waits
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- 31 Bill dispenser
- 32 Commotion
- 36 Monastery address
- 39 Mine matter
- 40 Roofed patio
- 41 Moses of the track
- 43 Decree
- 44 Out of style
- 45 Plane features
- 46 Forest growth

DOWN

- 1 Gorge
- 2 Roping contest
- 3 Harbor
- 4 Worker, e.g.
- 5 Folded food
- 6 "___ You Babe"

- 7 Flammable gas
- 8 Went in
- 9 Was rude, in a way
- 11 The Lorax's creator
- 17 "___ Miniver"
- 19 Bunny move
- 22 Instructed
- 24 Clause in a sports contract
- 25 Cleaner additive
- 27 Determined
- 28 Restaurant units
- 30 Mock
- 33 Instructional
- 34 Great Lakes tribe
- 35 Tears
- 37 Diplomatic skill
- 38 Successful songs
- 42 River stopper



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